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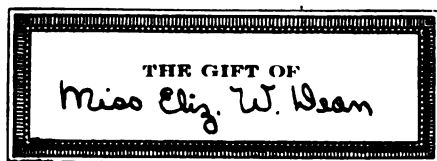
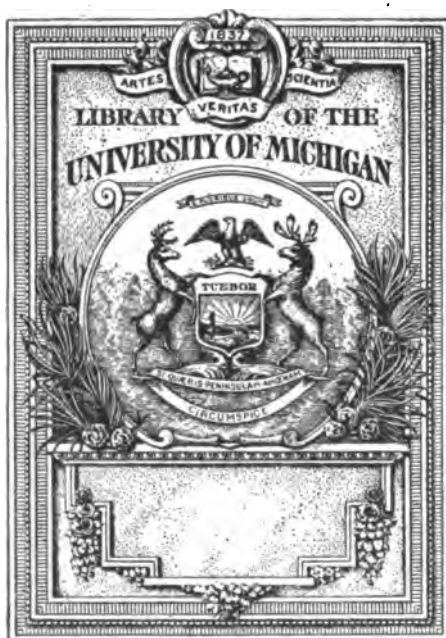
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**THE
CHARMED
CIRCLE**

NEW BORZOI NOVELS

FALL, 1921

PAN

Knut Hamsun

DREAMERS

Knut Hamsun

THE TORTOISE

Mary Borden

THE CHINA SHOP

C. B. Stern

THE BRIARY-BUSH

Floyd Dell

DEADLOCK

Dorothy Richardson

THE OTHER MAGIC

E. L. Grant-Watson

WHITE SHOULDERS

George Kibbe Turner

THE CHARMED CIRCLE

Edward Alden Jewell

THE BLOOD OF THE CONQUERORS

Harvey Fergusson

THE CHARMED CIRCLE

A COMEDY

BY

EDWARD ALDEN JEWELL



NEW YORK ALFRED · A · KNOPF

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Miss Eliz. W. Dean
97
10-29-1925

TO
MANETTE



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CONTENTS

CHAPTER

- I "HOW FAR THAT LITTLE CANDLE THROWS HIS BEAMS!" 3
- II FOURTEEN, NOT COUNTING THE TRUNK, 9
- III DINNER IN RUE JACOB, 14
- IV M^{LL}E. CYPRIENCE, 21
- V DEVELOPMENTS, 26
- VI JOLLY OLD BACHELORS WITH EMPTY HEARTS, 33
- VII SENORITA CASSIENDA FERRUCCO, 39
- VIII BROMLEY'S ARM GOES TO SLEEP, 43
- IX SENORITA MOVES IN, 47
- X FUR FLIES, 53
- XI THE MIGHTY HUNTER, 59
- XII AN IMPORTANT COMMUNICATION, 65
- XIII THE SECRET MISSION, 69
- XIV MRS. BRATHERS DEFENDS A MASTER, 78
- XV AN EPOCHAL TEA, 84
- XVI THE LAW IS LAID DOWN, 95
- XVII THE MIGHTY HUNTER AGAIN, 106
- XVIII SLAPS AND COUNTERSLAPS, 116
- XIX THE EPOCHAL HIGH WATER MARK, 125
- XX A PLOT UNPLEASING TO THE LATIN TEMPERAMENT, 132
- XXI THE CHARMED CIRCLE, 139
- XXII THE CAMP OF THE ENEMY, 146
- XXIII VERSAILLES QUAND MEME! 152
- XXIV A REFUSAL AND A SHOCK, 158

CONTENTS

CHAPTER

- XXV TOOTHACHE, 166
- XXVI A LITTLE JOURNEY IN HEAVEN, 174
- XXVII THE VOEUF SUBMITS AT CLOSE QUARTERS, 178
- XXVIII A DISAGREEMENT OVER A FEW POTATOES, 183
- XXIX BROMLEY GOES ARMED WITH A TALISMAN, 192
- XXX THE STREET CARS OF ATHENS, 199
- XXXI THREE IN A SEAT, 203
- XXXII EN FAMILLE, 209
- XXXIII A DESTINY ALL UPSIDE DOWN, 216
- XXXIV A WIDOWER AND A WIDOW, 222
- XXXV MRS. BRATHERS PUTS ON THE KETTLE TO BOIL, 228
- XXXVI MRS. BRATHERS GOES CALLING IN BOHEMIA, 232
- XXXVII KENNETH GOES AFTER THE HERB TONIC, 240
- XXXVIII THE INVENTION GETS UNDER WAY AGAIN, 245
- XXXIX DEJEUNER A LA FOURCHETTE, 249
- XL SENORITA PONDERs—, 255
- XLI —AND TELLS A FORTUNE, 260
- XLII THE MESSE DE MINUIT, 271
- XLIII THE CANDLE IS LIGHTED A SECOND TIME, 276



**THE
CHARMED
CIRCLE**



CHAPTER ONE

"HOW FAR THAT LITTLE CANDLE THROWS HIS BEAMS!"

HE slammed the door and sped into the street. It was late—five o'clock or after and November brings night-fall and lighted streets at that hour in Paris. Hugging a mysterious bundle under the ample folds of his *pèlerine*, he tore off into the bright maze.

Externally, Kenneth was quite French in his cloak and *béret*—a gay young student or artist from the left Quartier or Montmartre; yet beneath the blithe trappings he was American. In appearance he was slight; neither very short nor yet very tall for his age, with a face full of animation and broken lines. The eyes, under level brows, were bright with humour; and in them, as also at the corners of his mouth, there lurked about a million devils.

Once or twice he paused on his way to look into a lighted shop. Delightful shops. Nothing like them anywhere else—nowhere else that gay, personal informality. One shop in particular drew his eyes. This was a *rotisserie* in the *rue des Petits Champs* where the cooking was done directly beyond a plate glass front. The device, from the pedestrian point of view, was tantalising enough, especially at such an hour as this. Ah, the pangs occasioned by a spectacle of chickens, turkeys, young pigs, skewered beef and veal, ranged on spits before a grating of ardent coals, turning and turning, dripping out rich gravies, sizzling to the most ambrosial crispness, were terrible indeed! And they conjured up in one's mind the dining room in *Maison Bernard*—the familiar oval table and comfortable blue china.

A fine November rain. Gusts down this street and up that. Paris, and the lights of Paris! The people, people, people

of this great city! He raced on joyously, through the dark arches of the Louvre, zig-zag over the traffic-jammed river thoroughfare, out onto the crowded Pont du Carrousel, and so across the light-speckled Seine. His heart leapt at the shrill blowing of whistles as laden river boats floated down on the current, or patiently chugged up. What a time to be out, in the midst of things!

Once over on the left bank of the Seine, Kenneth hadn't a great way to go. Just along the rue des Saints Pères, a short way, and so round a corner into rue Jacob. Kenneth lived in rue Jacob—Maison Bernard, a snug *deuxième*, which belonged to Monsieur and Madame on a ten year lease. The lease however, was in Madame's name, because she was the money-maker of the family. She opened up her house to pensionnaires—something neither Monsieur nor Jacques would have had the initiative or courage to do!

Almost next door, in rue Jacob, there was a very modest and naturally very limited book shop, devoted mostly to works of a special or vaguely unpopular type. For all it was so minor, however, the tiny shop was brightly lighted. An awning, narrow and low, kept off the weather. You could stand outside and explore the displayed literature just as far as your hands would reach, not passing actually inside the shop at all—unless it happened to be the whole shop you wanted. Such appeared not to be the pretension of a certain gaunt, grey-clad, gaitered, oldish gentleman who embraced a dry umbrella under his arm and read with quiet absorption in a lemon volume entitled *Les objets d'art au dix-huitième siècle*. At first there seemed almost no complex note at all; but as one looked at him attentively one came to feel that he was perhaps not so simple. . . . Everything in the bearing of this gentleman suggested the spruce, the immaculate, the studious alertness and relaxation combined, of one perfectly used to getting about by himself. He was not an aggressive sort of gentleman, yet neither was he the sort of gentleman who will permit himself to be shoved into the cupboard of back numbers. The gentleman stood calmly and

read calmly. Nevertheless there was a curious preparedness, too, radiating almost as an aura from his sharp, bent shoulders. And when he felt his umbrella violently withdrawn from its snug clutch, he very promptly dropped the calm lemon volume and cried out in somewhat hysterical dismay.

"You young villain!" exclaimed the grey gentleman all at once quite comically and unconvincingly stern. "Only this morning you promised. . . ." And the grey gentleman shook his head sadly. Who knew, by this time, so well as he, that Kenneth's promises were worth no more than kite paper?

"Unfortunately you're too big, I suppose, or you'd go on bread and water — yes, and be locked in!"

Mr. Bromley was always maintaining that such shocks as this would one day go to his heart in some way. There was absolutely nothing the matter with Mr. Bromley's heart, but he liked to fancy that it wasn't strong — just interestingly not strong.

"Well, now I'm so completely jolted, I'll go home. I'd meant to get through that essay to-day. But to-morrow will do at a pinch." He sighed.

And then he raised up his dry umbrella over them both, and marched the boy a little playfully but very stiffly along. Bromley had a way of appearing stiff when he tried to be playful. It couldn't be done.

When this odd pair reached the courtyard of Maison Bernard they turned in, and the outer night knew them no more.

But their final disappearance from view was watched by a pair of very sharp eyes. These eyes belonged to a crouching bit of female humanity, which, stealthily concealed behind a protecting angle of wall, trembled and muttered unintelligible things under its breath as it peered after the departing figures. It was quite obvious, or would have been to anyone who had been observing this woman during the last hour, that she was on Mr. Bromley's track. She had followed him all the way over from his club, and had lurked near the book stall while he read so calmly in the lemon book about

objets d'art. It would seem that Mr. Bromley had now, at last definitely eluded his strange pursuer; but she turned away with a gleam of satisfaction, almost of triumph, in her flashing little black eyes—sped abruptly off in the rain, her head lowered, unmindful of the gusty wet.

Kenneth laid the mysterious bundle on his bed. After dinner, after the usual evening *en famille* in the Bernard salon—finally, after reading his guardian to sleep, in the prescribed manner—Kenneth undressed and slid into bed under the bundle. He sat bolstered up. Beside him burned his little lamp with its yellow *crêpe* shade. Madame Bernard often reminded him that the beautiful shade had once been in her room, on *her* lamp. Madame could quite overwhelm one with a sense of her generosity. But to return to the bundle. He rolled up his sleeves and dived into it—yet a little tenderly as one who knows quite intimately what the wrapping conceals. The object which he drew forth was a large, shiny birthday cake, with wonderful pink and white icing.

“Damn!” said Kenneth under his breath. For he had forgotten the candles. He had certainly meant to buy some to go with the cake—a dozen and a half, which would have afforded three to grow on. But his sigh was light-hearted. Never mind. Here was the cake, and the cake was the main concern.

With the aid of a great pocket hunting-knife used principally for sharpening pencils, he cut a huge hunk out of the cake and crammed his mouth full. Then suddenly he remembered that the greater bundle had contained a lesser! He had forgotten the candles, but he had not forgotten a fine, frilled snap-cracker—just one. It had a kind of forlorn look. But he seized it up gaily and pulled on the end fuses till the tiny explosion occurred. He giggled a little and refilled his mouth with cake.

As a matter of fact, Kenneth was really too large a lad to be carrying on like this over a juvenile snap-cracker. But when you are the only guest at your own party, liberties are conceded, and it is rather necessary to make the most of things.

Had Mr. Bromley not been so profoundly snoring just then, and had suspicion bidden him peer in through the door, ajar between their two rooms, he would have been horrified to see his protégé bolstered up in bed and gorging himself on cake. He would have blinked with amazement at the perky paper cap, which had come out of the snap-cracker rolled up in poetry, and which was now set awry upon the foolish head of the only guest. Yes, Mr. Bromley would have been amazed and shocked. Mr. Bromley had long ceased to have birthdays himself.

Kenneth sighed as he acknowledged a positive incapacity to put away any more of the beautiful confection. Still, he had done tolerably well by it.

Scrambling out of bed, he crossed over to the window, where he stood some time, shutting out the glow of the lamp by cupping his hands against the panes, thus focusing his eyes down toward the blank garden. And he exclaimed softly. Yes, the candle still burned in the singer's window! He had seen her put it there late in the afternoon, just before he set out to buy his birthday cake.

The conduct of this lady had been puzzling him a good deal all day. Her floor had been so unusually quiet. Yet it seemed almost certain she hadn't gone out. She rarely went into the city except in a certain low victoria, whose driver she engaged by the season. Kenneth knew all about this arrangement, having brazenly wormed the intelligence out of the driver himself. So long as her season lasted in Paris, the old fellow was sure of a steady job—as well as all the business he could pick up between times. She was a singer at the Opéra. That much they all knew. And no struggling, yearning student either, having a devil of a time, and desperately trying to keep the folks at home from losing faith. She was a real person. She was famous. Still, she was not oppressively famous.

To-day the old driver, so far as Kenneth knew, hadn't put in an appearance at all. This would argue that she hadn't gone out. Yet how account for the silence? No accustomed

hours of clean, vigorous practice. Silence. Only once it had been broken — just after she lighted the candle. Then she had sung, very softly, a sad and mysterious air. How did it go? Ah . . . ! No, no . . . Kenneth rubbed his bare feet up and down his shins. He tried repeatedly, but couldn't remember how it went. Funny, he thought, how you can so entirely forget a thing like that, yet how immediately you would recognize it if you heard it again. Which proved that it must be somewhere in his head all the time.

The clocks spoke over the city, and the little candle burned on, two floors below, in the window of the singer's apartment on the ground floor.

The wind was rising, a harsh November wind. It rattled blinds, the way wind does, especially late at night, and it came draughtily in through the cracks of the sagging dormer. His little paper cap was sent fluttering to the floor.

And the candle burned on, its flame only now and then stirred by the night wind. It was a mystery. He loved mysteries. The only thing he loved, perhaps better, was the fun of solving them.

After quite a long time, Kenneth withdrew from the chilly dormer, blew out the lamp with the pretty crêpe shade which had once belonged to Madame, and jumped into bed. Ordinarily he would be asleep almost at once. But tonight he lay awake some little time thinking about the singer downstairs, and about the solitary candle burning in her window.

CHAPTER TWO

FOURTEEN, NOT COUNTING THE TRUNK

MRS. TIMOTHY BRATHERS arrived at half past five the next afternoon. She had come for the winter; and certainly she could not have chosen a more wintry day for the invasion. Fog, drizzle, low-hanging clouds—"a beastly climate," Mr. Bromley called it.

Most curiously, it so happened that all the clocks in the house were striking as Eléonore, Madame's ample-footed maid, stood ready to open the door. No one ever knew the clocks to be all together like this before. One would be slow, another fast. It could not but be significant somehow. . . .

Kenneth lounged in the doorway between Bromley's room and the corridor, wondering lazily what might develop in the impending relationship of Mrs. Brathers and the Voef. Voef? one asks. Voef? Mr. Bromley a widower? Ah, yes. It was, of course, wrong of Kenneth to call him the Voef. There was certainly in it a more than implied irreverence. This, however, was based on Kenneth's incapacity to conceive of his guardian as an actually married man. The plunge had occurred considerably before his time; and he never summoned sufficient courage—though there was otherwise plenty of brass in his composition—to ask any particulars about the now so obscure and remote Mrs. Bromley.

Mr. Bromley had come forth from his room, and stood now within the embrasure of some little dormer windows in the corridor, looking out with an interest he didn't bother about concealing.

Anyone observing that droll and anxious face, so like a solemn owl's at times, must know that Mr. Bromley was ac-

cepting these events (the arrival of Mrs. Brathers and the striking of the clocks) as conspiring to usher in some sort of new epoch. Of course, as yet, he could be thought of as only mildly concerned. He had been poking along so many years, and had watched with his alert little pale grey eyes the advent of so many epochs. However, an epoch was an epoch. Age is no proof against folly. He still must dream his dreams, though Romance had taken to coming on, of late, with somewhat tattered edges.

Yes, even the clocks were conspiring. They seemed beforehand to have timed, and to be now triumphantly announcing, the arrival of Mrs. Timothy Brathers, much bundled and veiled. It was an auspicious beginning. No epoch, in years, had opened up so auspiciously. Yet all the Voeuf said now was:

"Did you ever see so many bags in your life?"

Then, being methodical, he fell to counting them as they were handed out to the *concierge*.

"Fourteen, not counting the trunk," announces Mr. Bromley, with great solemnity, stroking his well-trimmed iron-grey beard. "What a lot of luggage the women do require, don't they?"

"Yes," answers Kenneth. "And I guess perhaps this lady a little more than the average."

"Why do you say that?" demands Mr. Bromley — already, one sees, a little concerned, as though the lady were looking to him to champion her somehow. The boy made no definite reply, merely smirked and looked foolishly wise.

Mr. Bromley gazed eagerly down through the window till the last flutter of arrival had left the courtyard more than ever gloomy. Then he tiptoed back across the corridor and into his own room. However, he was careful to leave the door open a crack. And at the crack he bent to listen. How like a spry mouse he looked, with what remained of a once quite military bearing; with his anxious, homely face; with his attentive ears and crop of thin, militant hair! Presently there was a bustle out in the entrance hall, during the whole of which, as was to be expected, Madame dominated with her shrill treble. Like most French voices, hers could be wonder-

fully rich and sonorous upon the proper occasions; but, as with *all* French voices, the treble had its distinct place. Eléonore was heard stumbling over a rug—she seemed to draw things irresistibly towards her feet, as though they were endowed with magnets. Yet, though Madame Bernard reproved her for this offence, she was careful not to do it with quite the customary vehemence. What must be created was a quiet home atmosphere. Yes, that was it. Madame Bernard knew perfectly well that it would never do to strike a wrong note to begin with for Mrs. Brathers. No, it never paid. The right sort of *pensionnaires*—the sort with sufficient purse and tolerable sticking qualities—weren't by any means too plentiful.

Madame hoped that Mrs. Brathers would prove a *pensionnaire* of the right sort. True, she had been rather freely and not always quite flatteringly under discussion in the salon for evenings back, when one might remark about the corners of Madame's enigmatic lips a smile at once indulgent and damning—especially following the receipt of letters relative to the engaging of a room, with finite and infinite specifications about fires and the thousand and one small details so essential to the comfort of luxurious Americans in a foreign capital. From that smile of Madame's it might be safely inferred that Mrs. Brathers' French wasn't always quite so idiomatic as one could wish. She wrote, in truth, as she talked, with a most distinct accent.

Our eager mouse, listening at the crack, his sharp shoulders lowered and one foot set behind the other at some distance, seemed really about to spring out. In the distance Mrs. Brathers could be heard gently panting. She was fatigued from the climb. At Baden-Baden she had had rooms on the ground floor, and a *deuxième* isn't by any means a ground floor. She sighed a very long sigh, and then Mr. Bromley's large ears were charmed with a gratified little "*Ah, voilà!*" which signified that the lady had safely attained the last long stage in an arduous journey. "*Ah, voilà!*" And that was all.

"No," he said breathlessly, not yet stirring from his crack, "I can't hear a thing now."

"Try putting your head all the way out," Kenneth suggested.

"Sh-h-h! How can I hear when you keep talking?" He frowned and listened harder than ever. But it wasn't any use.

"I wonder." The Voeuf stopped. But as he departed from the beguiling crack he continued to wonder, as was evidenced by his pausing halfway across to the dressing table and scratching his head. This public indecision, however, was too much for Kenneth, who, sprawled on the bed, ventured: "I guess she couldn't help herself, sir."

The Voeuf turned on him a look of crimsoning reproach. "What nonsense are you talking?" And he rattled the implements about on his washstand.

All being now quiet, save for a very distant hum of voices in the kitchen and the occasional banging of a door, Mr. Bromley, his vigil relaxed, addressed himself to the matter of his dinner toilet. The toilet of Mr. Bromley was a vital, an even awful proceeding. He was a man of dapper habit and method, of trim regard for all ordered proprieties. There never was any variation to speak of. In the leisure course of events this evening (as, indeed, upon every other evening) it became urgent that he have some hot water. So he took up a small silver bell off the dressing table, crossed the room, opened the door, and set up a complicated tinkling in the corridor. Months ago, and after considerable experiment, a code of signals had been established with the kitchen. To ring once, a long time, meant he found himself of a morning too weary to rise and desired his chocolate and *petit pain* served up. Two sharp blasts signified he'd a letter which must be carried down to the *concierge* for immediate mailing. Three times meant—well, it would be simply out of the question to attempt running through the whole catalogue of a gentleman's

wants. Suffice it to say that the system, once thoroughly memorised, worked most admirably.

A low voice, accompanied by gentle rapping, presently announced: "*Monsieur, de l'eau chaude.*"

Mr. Bromley opened the door, and, as usual, there was ungainly Eléonore on the threshold, a steaming pitcher clutched in her rough rural hands. However, she displayed an alacrity hardly consorting with the stolid calm of her broad rural face. Hurriedly entering, she brushed right past Mr. Bromley, though he made a motion as willingly to relieve her of her burden at once. Eléonore preferred not to be relieved. With a kind of dreamy air she deposited the pitcher on his little white stand. Her preoccupation was a thing of breathlessness and romance. It had nothing at all to do with Mr. Bromley's plain recognition of the need of scrubbing. And yet it most emphatically had something to do with Mr. Bromley. It had, in fact, everything in the world to do with Mr. Bromley. Poor Eléonore, just up from the provinces . . . This was her first American gentleman.

Kenneth learned one day from Miss Curtis, a young lady living in the house, who had it from the cook, that Eléonore was badly given to raving about Mr. Bromley in the pantry. This intelligence Kenneth, of course, took delight in communicating at once to the party most concerned, who had frowned and grumbled, like one much sought after. . . .

Upon the present occasion, her mission obviously fulfilled, she was hurried off with a voluble "*Merçi, merçi, vous êtes bien aimable, mon enfant.*"

Her eyes were soulful, but she closed the door.

CHAPTER THREE

DINNER IN RUE JACOB

THE salon formalities being ended, Mr. Bromley found himself sitting directly opposite Mrs. Timothy Brathers. She, as was customary with new arrivals, occupied the place of honour, at Madame's right. Mr. Bromley still cherished the vague sense of distinction he had himself once experienced sitting in that supreme position. Of course, there were drawbacks. When it devolved upon Madame to shoulder the two-foot loaf and carve off, in her vigorous way, hunks of bread for the serving basket, then the incumbent of the honour, chair must needs recline at a temporarily rather acute angle. One faced, it is quite true, the necessity of bending far over out of harm's way; for Madame insisted upon carving the bread at the table, and the only way to handle a French loaf is to shoulder it — such processes, like the paraphernalia of circuses, requiring space. Otherwise, the distinguished pleasure of sitting upon the right hand of Madame Bernard went unspoiled.

Kenneth, by nature incorrigibly communicative, had developed a contrary habit of listening and watching at table. So rich were the average rewards that he generally went away with a sense of being stuffed in rather more than the usual dining room sense. In the wan eyes of his guardian he now perceived the kindling of a tremulous fresh interest. But as for Mr. Bromley — he realised it had in truth begun for him up under the eaves when he had seen expectation, promise, romance — all those brighter facts of life — stamped, right along with the labels from almost everywhere, upon her very baggage in the street. And Mrs. Brathers — well, of course, hers was now a multiplicity of interests. She found herself

(though *this* was nothing new!) set down quite amongst strangers; and, as is commonly the case under such circumstances, she could not hope in any very clearcut manner to discriminate. Her eyes tentatively swept the oval of faces, each face potentially interesting. No, she couldn't hope to begin really discriminating yet. But one fact may be set down as unqualified—her new surroundings very emphatically impressed Mrs. Brathers. This was her kind of people, her kind of house. Her somewhat faded, but still alert hazel eyes, skipped eagerly about the room, their gaze resting only sparingly on any object encountered—just a moment's perch and fly-away, hastening on to another. Everything was relatively important. A seasoned traveller, Mrs. Brathers enjoyed the privilege of classifying life as she pleased. She had earned the privilege. Yes, she was a lady to whom, most truly, the adjective "emancipated" seemed adhering.

What she looked round upon was a room whose principal recommendation was its being French. Aside from that, it was not a large *salle-à-manger*; neither was it high nor very well lighted. However, there was a little good silver in the cabinet, and the windows opened out quite handsomely on to narrow Continental balconies, from which one could look right down into an extensive garden where there were fine old trees with moss on their trunks. On the long hot evenings of summer, especially with the moon sailing high, the garden could be a very romantic place indeed—especially when Mlle. Cyprienne, two floors down, permitted her fingers to explore the keyboard in their whimsical way, and her voice to follow as it listed. Yes, in the spacious silence of the place at such times it was always hard indeed to believe oneself in the midst of a tumultuous, brilliant metropolis, only a step from the smart little rue Bonaparte, where omnibuses clattered incessantly by to and from the Odéon, the Bourse de Commerce, the Heights of Clichy and Montmartre, the distant Place de la Bastille.

But hold! These are tropical memories, no mistake, and we are in the dreary clutches of November, with all the

windows closed up tight. No, the garden is hardly a romantic place to-night, all soggy with wet moss and dripping branches. And the house of the singer is dark. Upstairs in our *deuxième* the oval of diners presents an ever so much more comfortable sight.

Mrs. Brathers was quite voluble over her soup, addressing Madame especially (whom she saluted in the good, plain, sensible American style: Madam), and recounting in a lively fashion those inevitable complexes of even a little protracted jaunt in Europe. Madame, for her part, remained throughout the recital commercially sympathetic, though her attitude had somewhat heroically to be bolstered for the occasion. In her private mind, it must be admitted, Madame harboured no very charitable valuation of the mentality of travelling American ladies. American ladies have — well, in a word, they have a way of growing wonderfully romantic in Europe. They seem to pick up the tune of life, and hum it evermore. They grow to be an inalienable part of things. After spending winters in this place, summers in that; with countless visits to familiar or unheard of places of interest; with the stimulating memory of strolls through numberless galleries upon the arms of learned gentlemen friends, they acquire a kind of elevation of spirit — an elevation which is rather difficult, perhaps, of definition, but which ends by bringing them triumphantly into their own. Having learned to do without the last word in plumbing, to feast their souls on art and culture generally, they are prepared to propound the secrets of Europe. In short, they are *emancipated*. And so, as one of the emancipated, Mrs. Brathers told her tale of the adventurous excursion from Baden-Baden.

Yes, Madame was sympathetic. Monsieur, her quite impressive husband, was, after his custom, pleasantly gruff. Jacques responded sparingly, but remained, on the whole, indifferently solicitous. And as for Bromley — well, you never could stop the wagging of that tongue. He'd a word to slip in somehow, everywhere: cheerful, echoing sentiments — repetitions of the tail-ends of her sentences. These things kept him constantly in

the swim, till at length she found herself addressing him more and more exclusively—and with a warming detachment.

Conversation from this stage was pretty much of the drifting variety. However, Miss Curtis, referred to elsewhere in connection with the pantry indiscretions of Eléonore, stemmed the tide a moment—somewhat disastrously, as it turned out. Miss Curtis was an artist with ideals, from Chicago. She boasted a studio in the Fine Arts Building, and wore glasses of the “sure-on” variety,” which one always felt to be just on the verge of falling off. She seemed forever occupied with a luminous, incommunicable something just over the border of any matter immediately at hand. “I should like to know why it is,” she remarked, “that everybody seems so wild over Corot. It seems to me he’s forever signing his name to pictures on which he had just got nicely started. No symbolism—*pas du tout!*” She gestured vaguely. “No elaboration of the *mystical*—which is really the soul of good painting to-day.”

It was a call to arms, for Monsieur Bernard professed to admire Corot immensely, and Miss Curtis ultimately regretted having started so acrimonious a tirade. Monsieur Bernard’s eyes always protruded dreadfully, like a frog’s when he became engrossed in any topic—even one so apparently uncontroversial as the correct frying of potatoes in deep fat. (It was thus he liked them best of all—and a tender topic, though the matter need not be dwelt on at this point.) Yes, the eloquence of Monsieur, so easily stirred, was really something fearful. Still Kenneth always maintained that if one felt disposed to tremble before the mighty beetling of that brow, one need only to look across the table at Madame, who remained always throughout all her husband’s wildness, so beautifully cool and unmoved. Madame didn’t, as a matter of fact, in the least take her husband seriously.

But dessert was by this time finished, and the diners trailed off into the salon for their coffee.

The salon was by all means the most interesting room in Maison Bernard. Low and full of delightful shadows, whether

by daylight or lamplight, it had windows, like the dining room, opening upon little balconies that overhung the garden. A large horsechestnut tree grew so close to this particular corner of the house that in summer the great, dark leaves would sometimes brush the panes or rustle pleasantly against the stiff lace curtains when the windows were thrown wide. Upon the hottest nights there were almost sure to be at least tiny breaths of cooler air drifting up out of the still garden—zephyrs which were scarcely robust enough, perhaps, to stir the heavy tapestries, but which would move about gently among the curious old things, sometimes luring elixirs out of the quaint twin vases on the mantelpiece, in which dried rose leaves were kept. In winter the room, with fiery streams pouring in from a distant hot-air furnace, was always close and cosy.

Kenneth often speculated as to whether it would be at all feasible to climb down the horsechestnut and so escape, Mr. Bromley had an indefinite horror of Paris by night—the Paris proverbially visited at such hours by curious youths. Of course, for Bromley himself it was different. He hoped he knew life. He hoped he hadn't lived his life for naught. Nothing could harm Bromley. The thought would be ridiculous. But the horror nevertheless lived—as regarded Kenneth. Kenneth was an infant, put by law under Mr. Bromley's personal supervision. So when it was anywise in that gentleman's power or anywise suited his convenience, Kenneth stayed safe at home. "Boys," he liked to declare, when favoured with an audience capable of appreciating his spruce sagacity, "boys should have regular sleep and nourishing food. They should not be restrained too much, and neither should they be allowed to run wild. Take a boy into your *confidence*. Show him you *trust* him. . . ."

But Kenneth didn't greatly reverence this astute philosophy of education. To tell the truth, he thumbed his nose at it, and could, were it not too patently impolitic, shock Bromley with a Paris the latter had never really glimpsed at all, despite his having "lived" and his "hoping he knew life." Still,

even an elaborate slyness was sometimes insufficient to open up avenues of escape until the guardian lids dropped and the guardian nostrils added their note to the multiple voices of the night. So Kenneth perforce got what he could out of the generally diverting enough after-dinner salon.

From the unassuming retirement of his favourite corner he was at liberty to observe all things that passed. This "corner" of his wasn't really an angle at all: it was merely a square fluff rug bounded by a fringe of its own bright orange lining, and its geographical location brought it into a torrid zone, snug up against the upholstered chaise longue upon which Madame always reclined of an evening. Thus fortified, his position was as delightful as a box at the theatre. Indeed, he not infrequently caught himself on the rather dangerous verge of applauding.

Kenneth made his obedient bow at nine-thirty. At the same hour Miss Curtis also trailed off to read French lyrics. She impulsively bent and kissed Madame goodnight, this being a by no means unusual proceeding. Madame submitted to being kissed with marvellous fortitude. She allowed herself to be made a sort of a temporary mother, because what folly it would be not to keep her pensionnaires contented! What she strove to establish was a real "home atmosphere."

At the window Miss Curtis paused, peering down for a moment into the dark garden.

"Does *anyone* know anything about the singer?" she asked in her careful Chicago French. Being naturally interested in mysteries, she had ere this solicited information from all the individual members of the household. This, however, was the first collective query.

"Yes," replied Madame calmly, without looking up from her sewing, "the singer is called Mlle. Cyprienne." Her tone had about it a comfortable air of conclusion. What more could anyone know about the singer downstairs, unless. . . . Her eyes narrowed a little, and now she did look up briefly. "Have you heard anything?"

Miss Curtis shrugged casually. "I've heard that she's not French."

"*Tiens?*"

Kenneth, who was holding open the door for the idealist from Chicago, thought he detected a tendency toward unwonted fidgeting in the Voef. This, however, could scarcely be observed by the world at large, for that gentleman was all the while most devotedly conversing with Mrs. Brathers. "Heavens!" thought Kenneth, parenthetically juggling with what he termed his intuition, "if the singer should be his wife!" But the moment passed. Miss Curtis went on out. Kenneth followed her. And the Voef kept right on talking with Mrs. Brathers.

This left Madame alone representing her household in the salon. The worst of the situation was that Mr. Bromley and Mrs. Brathers, sitting at the table together over cards which had long ceased to pass between them, so far forgot the common proprieties as to converse in English. It was very rude, besides being distinctly contrary to the laws of the house. The laws of the house were unwritten. Still, they were laws.

Madame's ear-straining did her no good. She couldn't understand a single word. She stitched angrily, and when her bed time arrived decided to relinquish the field to the foreign alliance, which was proving too much for her. She rustled noisily about the salon, plucking threads and a strayed thimble off the carpet, always shooting suggestive and impatient side glances their way. At length Madame flounced out, uttering one pointed *ahem*, arching her eyebrows in a pained manner, shrugging her French shoulders, and thus in high disdain giving them up to their own peculiar standards of morality.

Yes, their's was a morality she couldn't comprehend. Madame couldn't grasp the United States idea. So she sailed grandly out and let the door bang crisply—even assisting it a little with her foot, a sly back-stroke of heel.

CHAPTER FOUR

MLLE. CYPRIENNE

MEANWHILE, Kenneth, though he had dutifully enough forsworn the fascinating salon, had no intention whatever of going dutifully to bed for many busy hours. He knew his guardian, nor were the symptoms of a new-born Epoch wasted upon him. So far as Mr. Bromley was concerned he was, he knew, quite safe. It was almost too easy. First he hurried away to Montmartre for a taste of the Grand Guignol horrors. Then he sped back across the city to the Café Panthéon, a persistent triumph of Latin Paris, where bedangled young ladies are said sometimes to dance, on the very tables, and where upon this occasion he found Max, one of his most venerable Quartier acquaintances, who was never happy without a chess board and a patient opponent. One had, of necessity, to be patience itself when playing chess with old Max, because he had once been a Yogi, and time meant absolutely nothing to him. He never bothered with any computations less leisurely than the Yugas of Brahma, and consequently would go into a kind of trance or petrification over every play. After the session at chess, Kenneth fell in with a roughneck band of students parading a grudge against some hapless professor, and determined, after the custom, to advise the whole town of the situation. Kenneth, as French as any one in his *pèlerine*, and, though minus the personal stimulus of a grudge, more vocal than anyone except the leader himself, hung on loyally, execrating with terrific nerve on the very excellent basis of general principles, till in course of time and events the once numerous band had evaporated into merely a few soused individuals without special aim and

in augmenting danger of arrest. And it was, after all these orgies, not quite twelve when he crept home, torn with speculation as to whether, indeed, Mrs. Brathers had stood by the ship.

Just as he reached the house gate in rue Jacob, a carriage drew up to the curb, and a lady, darkly and richly clad, all bundled in furs, stepped out.

"Goodnight, François," said she to the *cocher*. "No, you needn't wait. I'll send you word about to-morrow."

She spoke very smooth French, yet with an accent. It was Mlle. Cyprienne.

As the carriage drove off, she turned to the gate, where Kenneth was discovered in the act of rather rudely gazing at her. For a moment they stood there together, a little awkwardly. Then she asked him whether he had rung the bell.

His laugh sounded in the silent street. "I'd forgotten to ring!" he said. And then she laughed too, although there was perhaps nothing intrinsically humorous in his having forgotten.

He pulled vigorously at the bell wire; but it chanced that Mrs. Concierge, usually so prompt to open, was just at that moment administering some juniper to an infant with the croup, and so did not hear the summons at all.

"It is cold," observed the lady, who nestled her chin in the furs, but kept her eyes searchingly upon the face of the lad beside her.

"But, yes," he agreed, beginning to stamp, boylike, and to throw his arms about. He was not really cold. The pretence was merely to show that he was perfectly at his ease.

"It seems rather worse than usual this season," she continued, speaking quite simply, as though they were old friends.

"You spend all your winters in Paris?"

She nodded. "I sing at the Opéra, you see."

Yes, he knew that.

Oh?

Yes, he had heard. Besides, he had heard her singing, many times.

No, really? At the Opéra?

Not yet, though he hoped to some day.

Ah, then he had heard her practicing. She was very fearful of annoying people.

But that would be impossible.

Monsieur was kind.

No, but monsieur thought he had a taste for good music.

Was he—was monsieur possibly a musician himself?

Oh, no! And again his laugh was in the still rue Jacob.

All this gave Kenneth a feeling of immense advantage over the people upstairs. The best they could do was peer out of the windows and torture their souls with theories, whereas here he was, right down at her side—talking with the mysterious singer and laughing with her as though they were the oldest sort of friends. And he wondered what Mr. Bromley would say if he could see him close beside this singer here before the gate at midnight—Bromley, who always seemed to fidget at the very mention of her name. . . .

She shivered and drew the furs closer about her.

"Do you think"—they spoke altogether in French—"the *concierger* may perhaps not have heard?"

And then Kenneth recollected that they were waiting to get in. He jerked the wire handle again, and this time set up such a jangle as must all but have roused the entire building. Presently the gate swung, and Mlle. Cyprienne passed quickly into the courtyard. He closed the gate and followed. Midway across she hesitated and turned.

"I suppose we might be friends?" she suggested.

And in the centre of the courtyard, under the crisp November stars, the two shook hands.

"I have seen you often at your window," she said, in a quiet, homely way.

"And I have seen you sometimes at yours, too."

Then they were in the main entrance hall under a flicker of gas. He still could not see the lady's face very well because of the furs. But he could see that her eyes were brown and that her hair was nearly all silvered—a quite fas-

cinating combination, which made her somehow look surprisingly young. She said goodnight, rather wistfully, and turned away. The door to her apartment was just at hand.

"May I come to see you some day?" asked Kenneth, a shade breathlessly.

"Oh, yes," she began with quick brightness; then seemed dubious. "That is...."

"I'd like to, please, very much."

She looked at him queerly a moment. Then she started to speak. And then, suddenly, she thrust the big muff up over her face and turned, groping for the door. Without speaking a single word she inserted the key and was gone, while he stood where she had left him, at the foot of the stairs, under the dull gleam of gas, too surprised at first to move.

Indeed, he waited there some time, curious and a little awed. But her door did not reopen, nor was there any sound from beyond it. She was gone. And the mystery had, if anything, deepened. At length he turned and climbed up the two long flights to the *deuxième* which was Maison Bernard.

He let himself stealthily into the house and crept through to his own quarters. Mr. Bromley's room was quite dark. More amazing still, Mr. Bromley's room was painfully quiet. Not one snore was to be heard—though of course it might only mean that the widower had turned off his back. Kenneth softly lighted his lamp and pushed open a little way the door connecting their rooms. He peeped in. The mellow light from his lamp fell full on the widower's pillow. There was no owl-like face to be seen. *Bromley had not yet come to bed!*

Beyond the salon door was a hum of voices. And upright in a chair before the salon door, on the dining room side, sat Eléonore, her head nodding and nodding, a small night lamp burning beside her on a table. She was waiting up to extinguish the lamps in the salon.

The clocks throughout the house, though now they were no longer quite together, began striking the witching hour. Big Louis Quatorze out in the hall began it. Then Quinze, with

the bust of Du Barry on top, took up and reissued the report from a shelf over near the portrait of Jacques as a boy. Finally, a fragile Antoinette began piping in the salon. Also there was a far away booming over the city. And, taking all the voices together, lesser and greater, it was quite out of the question for anyone not to note the fact that it was midnight—except, of course, such as slept the sleep of poor Eléonore. Within the salon there fell a sudden brief hush, followed by the pushing back of chairs and the rustling of a silk gown. The door of the salon opened and the guilty pair emerged.

“Sh-h-h!” Bromley cautioned, in a whisper of such raucous quality that it could easily be heard to the farthest extremity of the house.

At the sight of Eléonore they stopped short. But Eléonore, with her artless adoration of her first American gentleman, slept gently on. And over the unconscious maid from provincedom Mr. Bromley and Mrs. Brathers shook hands, while the latter, blushing a little, sighed. It was agreed between them that instead of waking the forlorn creature and having to observe her confusions, Mr. Bromley was to bang his door. Timothy had taught his widow to be kind to all living beings and had just begun to have theories also about inanimate nature when the Dark Angel paused on his threshold.

Mr. Bromley took leave of her with hurried reluctance. He looked a little frightened as he began hastily undressing. Madame could see his light from her room in another wing were she minded to look out for an explanation of the crashing door. But all the same there was reflected in Mr. Bromley's glass a look of such eager preparedness as appeared only at those times when epochs were well launched.

CHAPTER FIVE

DEVELOPMENTS

AFTER *petit déjeuner* Mrs. Brathers wanted to go to the *grand marché aux fleurs*.

"At the Madeleine?" Bromley inquired.

It was there he generally got his boutonnière, when he could not find what he wanted at his special little stall near the Pont Carrousel.

She looked at him a moment with some abstraction.

"No—I prefer the *marché* on this side of the river. It's beyond the Conciergerie—just how far I can't seem to remember. One forgets, doesn't one?"

"Yes," he agreed, "when one lives in many places, one forgets."

There was a little silence. They stood together in the *salle d'attente* near a small window garden, toward which the lady looked with some longing.

"It's flowers, of course, you want?" he suggested.

"Flowers," she answered, "and green things."

"Yes, yes, of course." He stroked his crisp beard.

She continued: "I always feel, you know, that my rooms are only half furnished without flowers and growing ferns. Until I've made a selection for myself, I *never* can think of settling for the winter."

"Quite sensible. I myself—"

But he was crowded out. "I like, you see, to convert my windows all into lovely gardens—like this one, only...."

"Only, of course, prettier?"

"Well, yes. More colour. More...."

"Distinction?" he suggested; then was pleased at his success.

"My husband always loved flowers," she continued; so that Bromley grudgingly decided the distinction was also to be shared by him.

"Your husband.....?"

"My lamented husband."

"Yes," soothed Bromley, "I had heard."

"It's fifteen years. And only one bereaved can know how slowly such years pass."

"Yes," said the Voëuf with emotion, "I know. You see I am a widower."

"Oh, you are a widower!"

He nodded and hoped his look might strike her as sufficiently solemn.

"Oh, indeed we *must* be friends," said she with a sad warmth.

"I was sure," he replied, "that we should be."

There was more talk about the flora. Mrs. Brathers described some lovely heliotrope she had blooming last winter in Bordeaux, and expressed the hope that she might be able to find some now. She displayed some slight confusion in the midst of the heliotrope tale, thus striking an impalpable chord of jealousy in the soul of this subtle Voëuf. "I wonder...." he thought, "now I really do wonder...." But why *shouldn't* she have had her epochs too?

"Would it—ah, I am afraid it *would* be bold and indelicate of me to ask you whether you would care to accompany me?"

She looked down demurely at one shoe. It chanced to be coming untied.

"Oh, it will give me much pleasure!" he cried, referring to the invitation. And then, his eyes following hers, he was gallantly right down on his still remarkably agile knee. "Do permit me," he said.

And she did.

"You see," she expanded, as she felt the string tighten over her arch, "I'm naturally fearful. This is such a great rushing city. Besides," she continued as he rose and un-

consciously dusted his knee, "one forgets, you know. It really is years since I've been to the *marché*."

"I'll just run for my hat and gloves. I could start in two minutes," he said eagerly. Then, as though feeling that in eagerness he might have been a shade over-zealous, he added: "Or—or when you're quite ready, of course."

"Well," she answered, smiling almost coyly, "suppose we were to make it five."

"I will be waiting here." And then he added, his native rush of sentiment escaping the verge of its reservoir: "—impatiently!"

Mrs. Brathers was well pleased and took a few steps toward her own room. Then she paused and turned back. Bromley was at the foot of his own little half flight.

"I don't know...." she hesitated.

"What is it?" he asked anxiously, coming back.

"Well, I suppose . . . Oh, *will* you think me perhaps very foolish? I suppose after all we oughtn't to go off like this together—quite yet . . ."

Bromley's face was far more solemn now than when he announced himself to be a widower.

"Oh," he said, "I'm quite sure...."

"Ah, yes, I know. I'm too fastidious. But dear me, over here...."

So they stood looking helplessly at each other.

Afar in the private corridor a door banged, and there was a boyish charge toward the stairs. Both faces brightened.

"Kenneth!" cried the Voef.

"But perhaps...."

"Tut, he'll go. Kenneth, see here." He captured the escaping lad.

"Kenneth, you will go along, won't you?"

"Of course," the boy answered. "Where?" At least it promised an escape from the terrible Sorbonne.

"For a stroll, to the *marché*. Good. Now I will run for my hat and gloves."

They emerged into the quiet little rue Jacob and steered for the busier rue Bonaparte.

"I believe," Mrs. Brathers illogically announced, "that I'd like to take a 'bus from here and walk back."

"Of course. Here we are—just at the corner. So."

An omnibus driven by gasoline came to an explosive stop, and Mr. Bromley helped the lady in, anxiously affording her support till she sank safely down upon the decaying plush. Kenneth climbed in after them, though he would have preferred the roof. Mr. Bromley, as was to be expected, usurped the entire scene, and Kenneth found himself reduced to a mere *bagage de convenance*.

The well filled vehicle jolted and pitched over rough pavements, the passengers being bounced like buoys at sea.

Kenneth was sitting next to a tall and somewhat ruddy gentleman with hair which was grey, particularly at the temples, and with singularly pleasant eyes. He had an outdoor look about him, yet also an easily carried urbanity—a subtly, and not at all obtrusively worldly air. He wore well fitting clothes and a bright tie. The pavements were so obstreperous that the stranger and Kenneth kept constantly bumping their shoulders together. After a little time this jolting contact was recognized by both in the form of a brief, friendly interchange of smiles.

"They seem to get worse each year, don't you think?" demanded the stranger at length. His voice matched his eyes. Kenneth decided this was a very pleasant sort of fellow all round.

"You mean the pavements?" he asked.

"Yes. Every time I come back there seem to be a few new bumps. But I suppose It's all somehow part of the charm."

"I guess so," replied Kenneth. There was a short pause, and then he added an admission which offered an avenue whereby the informal talk sustained and entrenched itself. "I can't judge as well as you. This is my first visit."

"Oh," responded his new friend, "then naturally you've been too busy with other things to bother about anything so

utterly unimportant as cobblestones. Have you been here only a short while?" he inquired.

"Yes, quite short. Only a couple of months."

"Ah, ha! Then you *have* been busy."

"Yes, and the days are so short."

"Lord, *aren't* they?" the other sympathized. "Even I find them so."

"But," Kenneth brightened, "the nights are more obliging, so there's nothing really lost, I suppose."

An amused gleam appeared in the man's eyes. "You're a night-hawk too?"

Kenneth glanced quickly and eloquently over his shoulder. "Yes," he said, coming back. "But a hawk *sub rosa*. You see," he expanded, "I have a guardian."

"Oh," nodded the man. And he laughed pleasantly.

"It does make a difference," Kenneth admitted, "feeling already well acquainted."

"I should think it might," the other said.

"But after all, not so great a difference as you would imagine," Kenneth told him, adding a confidential smirk which visibly amused the friend with whom he had so oddly yet characteristically bumped up acquaintance. And then he added: "In fact it makes hawking a great deal more interesting—more exciting, ever so much!"

"Yes, stolen fruit...."

"That's it. I see you understand these things." Then he went still further. "Perhaps, in your time, you've had a guardian, too."

"Perhaps I have," the man laughed.

And they left it there.

But the journey was long, and having someone to break its monotony was agreeable—seemed mutually agreeable. They talked of many matters, never wholly departing from the whimsical vein which distinguished what has already been chronicled. Kenneth poured out a great quantity of confidences. He described the sort of household of which he now was a member, and managed to amuse the stranger into almost

constant, if understandingly discreet, laughter. He even put on record between them the mingled joy and dismay of the weekly cleaning days in Maison Bernard—those days when dust flew high and lying low became a matter of real prudence.

"Such," observed the man, "are days when one is well out of the way. I know, because I, too, have lived through them. For doggedness there's nothing to match the French broom." And then he suggested a quite captivating escape. "Did you ever try a progressive luncheon? It takes ever so long, and has a way of making one forget."

"I'd be obliged," said Kenneth, "if you'd tell me how it's done. I'd like very much to try."

"Well, let's see," began his friend. "You live in this part of town? On this side of the river?"

Kenneth nodded. "Rue Jacob."

"Yes. Well, suppose you were to start at Saint Germain des Près. Here I'll draw you a little map, and you must follow it exactly." He drew a card out of his pocket, turned it over, found a pencil, and illustrated his talk as it proceeded. "You like *escargots*?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Well, then, right here," he indicated with a star, and mentioned the name of what he described as, "a queer little cramped café," on Boulevard Saint Germain. "You begin here with *escargots*. Then as soon as they're bolted, you scurry down underground and board a Métro train at the Saint Germain station, which will whirl you over to Place Saint Michel. See here?" His pencil traced the route. "At Saint Michel you debark and run up above ground to this café here—do you see?—just at this corner. It's quite interesting, and very much more pretentious than the place where you ate the snails. You stay long enough to nibble half a chicken, say, or a special omelette—or even the *plat du jour*, whatever it happens to be, which is likely to prove really very tolerable—and some salad. You see?"

"Yes, sir," said Kenneth, following the instructions with close interest.

"Well," pursued his friend, "next you descend underground again, and you don't emerge till you've reached the Place de l'Opéra—you see?—way over here. And then you trot into Café Riche for any sort of sweet that appeals to you. After that you run over the way to the Richelieu and take your coffee out on the sidewalk. And there you are," he concluded. "All you have to do is follow the map. Here." He handed over the card with its pencilled directions. Then, glancing out of the window, he signalled the conductor. "I get out at the next corner. Bye-bye."

The man smiled and nodded pleasantly. Then he swung down out of the 'bus and disappeared in the crowd.

CHAPTER SIX

JOLLY OLD BACHELORS WITH EMPTY HEARTS

AFTER Kenneth's new friend had descended from the bus, he entered Boulevard Saint Michel, strolled along past the Musée de Cluny, and turned into the quiet rue Racine. He seemed in no particular haste—walked along, indeed, with an air of lingering ease, sniffing the sunshine, and pausing outside his door to light a cigarette before passing reluctantly within.

Mr. Sterrett possessed a quite spacious apartment one flight up. Most of the time it stood empty and forlorn, even for whole stretches of years. He had it on a long lease, and, in a spasm of unusual affluence, had paid up all the rent ahead. This gave him, he pleaded when challenged, a feeling of real security. It was next best to owning a house yourself. And whenever he happened to be in Paris—which was, after all, pretty often—there was his own little diggings to drop right into without a word to any one.

Mr. Sterrett tossed aside his hat and gloves and entered a large, low room done in a most interesting and permanent style. It looked very much like a drawing-room in some bungalow on Long Island. The ceiling was heavily beamed, and there was a good-sized fireplace of rough field stone. The walls were a warm grey. A large table, cluttered with bright-looking books, contained also a handsome Chinese lamp and a curious big bowl for tobacco. The chairs were fabulously comfortable.

Now, although a bachelor, Mr. Sterrett had miraculously failed to acquire any of the qualities of the old maid. And this amounted almost to a contradiction in terms. Yes, for some strange reason or other he was hopelessly and incor-

rigibly masculine; a kind of big, irresponsible boy still; and it would have driven him wild to try any puttering around in his own behalf. Whatever was done in a household way must be done by means of hired female assistance. Mr. Sterrett would have thrown up his hands in frank dismay at the prospect of cooking himself a simple breakfast. His house was always vaguely disordered—sly notes here and there, which his bachelor friends would, of course, miss, yet which must at once, to the instinctively keener eye of a woman, disclose the fact that Mr. Sterrett was quite at the mercy of the world, and knew not the bolstering partnership of petticoats. For one thing, except directly after an incursion of his scrub woman, there were sure to be areas of dust; the heavy curtains at the windows gave evidence of having been thrust hastily aside; the wide, rich rug, also, was pretty sure to be wrinkled up a little beneath the leg of a chair. Yes, decidedly and indubitably, Mr. Sterrett was a bachelor.

He wandered in, whistling softly, paused, scratched his head, and appeared for a moment dreamily uncertain what particular design had brought him out of the alluring autumn sunshine. Ah—of course. The annual report of that traction company which operated cars in several of the Paris suburbs. Lord, he had so many of these vexing little interests, all round the globe. What a complex, harum-scarum business career!

Sighing briefly, he went on through into a little den where he had his desk. Here he sat down and began looking over some figures, wrinkling his forehead very hard and letting his breath escape in a long contemplative hiss. Now and then his eye strayed up to encounter the sympathetic gaze of a pair of very fine feminine eyes. The rest of the face was equally sympathetic and fine. No one could blame Mr. Sterrett for letting his eyes stray. In her oval of plain silver she proclaimed, for all who could see, the surpassing sympathy and fineness of one who has never had to acquire the virtues of distinction and understanding. The dreamy air with which Mr. Sterrett had entered his rooms hung on. He couldn't altogether shake it off, and the lady in the silver oval didn't

offer the least bit of help in this direction. Still, he recognized the necessity of getting at his traction papers to-day. "It's the weather," he muttered—and went right on smiling. He felt just as though it were a day in spring, or as though he were about to step into the radiance of some rare good fortune.

Presently there was a loud and business-like ring at the door. Mr. Sterrett dropped his task with almost a gesture of relief, and crossed the large room, treading heavily and throwing back his grey mane—a mannerism of childhood never outgrown. And then he opened the door and delightedly fell to shaking hands with a man whom he designated as, "Well, Old Bob!"

Old Bob, whose more formal name was Dr. Robert Henry, came in, beaming in a superlatively sleek and well-shaved way, simply radiating satisfaction with himself, his immediate environment, and, indirectly, with the entire universe. Dr. Henry was some younger in years than Mr. Sterrett, though sufficiently advanced to be growing bald. He was rather dapper, and dressed as immaculately as Albert Bromley. His voice was tenor; he wore gaiters, and had an enormously anti-septic look. His whole being exuded cleanliness. It amounted almost to a satire on cleanliness. He was like a living, breathing advertisement for some unparalleled dentifrice. And, as a matter of fact, Dr. Henry was a dentist. An American dentist in Paris, growing rapidly wealthy off French teeth. It would perhaps be difficult to discover a calling more lucrative than that of American dentistry in Paris. It goes without saying that Dr. Henry was strongly entrenched and had a most fashionable following. Socially he was something of a lion, too, went a good deal, and had a great many friends.

"But why this amazing leisure, at such an hour?" Sterrett wanted to know.

"Ah, you see, I'm on my vacation," replied Old Bob. "Been spending most of the time at my place in Puteaux, but came in to-day to look you up. I heard you were in town. Hugh, it's great to see you!"

After mutual felicitations, the two old friends sat down in Mr Sterrett's large room and stretched out their legs comfortably. Mr. Sterrett blew smoke hospitably into space; but Dr. Henry didn't smoke. He was too antiseptic to smoke.

"How long has it been—a year? Two years?"

"Surely not two!"

"Well, you're getting to be a stranger, all right. I suppose since we saw you last you've been wintering in Athens and springing in Spain, summering somewhere around Russia, and—well, anyhow, let's hope you can be induced to spend at least the autumn in Paris."

Mr. Sterrett laughed in his big, hearty way. "Never can tell. They're sending me pressing letters from Mexico. Two or three revolutions have been and went, and the next one promises to put our prosperous little oil venture on the blink. But I'm hoping the present government will hold out for a month or so longer. Paris sure does look good to me." Then he jumped up and said: "Can I give you something to drink?"

Dr. Henry raised a slim, cancelling hand. "Sworn off—absolutely, posolutely."

"Oh, come on!" exclaimed the other.

"Posolutely!"

"Oh, well," his friend shrugged, "a little Grenadine?"

"By all means, if you happen to have any handy."

Mr. Sterrett crossed over to one of the panels in the wall which looked exactly like all the other panels till, by touching a button, it was made to spring open. Within was a mysterious small cavern into which he thrust his head and hands. There was a deft sound of ice and mixing, and then he emerged with two glasses of Grenadine. They toasted each other and sipped—not that either of them was at all thirsty, but only because it was recognized to be the only decent thing for jolly old bachelors to do on an occasion like the present.

And over their glasses they talked in a pleasant and unhurried way about Mr. Sterrett and his affairs and about Dr. Henry and his affairs, about Paris and the Balkan wars and politics in America, about the prospects of another Lipton

race, about dogs and horses (of which both men were fond), about lucky stocks and, alas, unlucky stocks as well, and about a wonderful little variety actress the whole town was mad over. Nothing they said was of very tremendous importance. They were, after all, only a couple of old bachelors, and were supposed to know little or nothing about the serious facts of life.

Since Mr. Sterrett was the adventurer, his friend the dentist wanted to know all sorts of new particulars about his far-flung enterprises. Sterrett had really done about everything. His cosmopolitanism, by this time, was colossal. It had a momentum of its own. In the early days he had spent a good deal of time in the troublous region of Central America, where revolutions over-night were constantly being incited, fomented, and financed. They had even wanted to make him president of one brief mite of a republic, but he had declined the honour. These presidents almost always had their heads removed sooner or later to make way for a new régime. Then he had bought a schooner and taken it around the Horn with a cargo of machinery parts for the Orient. And then—oh, then he had ventured into the Arctic with an exploring party, and had come near the Pole without reaching it. And then he had shipped iron ore out of the Northwest. And then he had written a play adapted from the Russian of an obscure scribbler with divine talent in St. Petersburg, and had got it produced in New York. Music was added, and it ran two hundred nights. After that he had gone into the radiator business, and later shipped out to China in the interests of Standard Oil.

After an hour or two of this absorbing talk, Old Bob suggested carrying his friend off to the club for lunch. Mr. Sterrett looked momentarily a little concerned, and ran his hand doubtfully through his hair. "Damn it, that report—oh, well!"

"Let it slide," urged the dentist. "You'll never miss it, you old plute!"

"Plute my hat!" returned Sterrett with a short laugh. "Unfortunately, for all my ventures, I'm as poor as a parson. You deal only in cash and you can't appreciate the mess I'm

always in, trying to keep reasonably square with the world. Well, wait a minute."

He disappeared into his bedroom.

While Mr. Sterrett was putting on a fresh collar, his friend strolled about, squinting with a vague degree of appreciation at the paintings—there were a few rather good ones: a Blake-lock, for one, whose authenticity had been questioned, but which, to the credit of its present owner, had emerged triumphant; and, over the fireplace, a very small Meissonier, done in that famous painter's second best manner. After a casual round the dentist wandered on into the den, where he paused before the face in the silver frame.

"Oh, Hugh!" he called out. "I see you still have the same girl."

A voice came muffled from a distant washbowl. "Yes, Bob—same girl."

The dentist stood some time gazing at the face which went wherever Hugh went, no matter how outlandish the region. A queer, solemn look came into the dentist's eyes, making him older, for a moment, and a little sad. Certainly there was fidelity for you! Lord! And he realized that there was something deeper in poor old Hugh than the cheery, hail-fellow they all knew otherwise so well. Yes, something, by George, positively abysmal. And then the dentist sighed, thinking opaquely of his own life. And a feeling of emptiness sharpened the lines about his eyes. He tried to throw off the mood as Sterrett came in, drawing on his coat. They stood there for a kind of awed moment, side by side, looking at the woman in the silver frame. Then Dr. Henry laughed nervously, and the spell was broken.

Arm in arm, the two jolly old bachelors, with their eternal immaturity and their empty hearts, descended to the street.

"Save that light!" said Mr. Sterrett, poking his cigarette into the cup the other had made of his hands. "Good. Now let's go. I'm starving!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

SEÑORITA CASSIENDA FERRUCO

BUT to return to the 'bus. That neither Mr. Bromley nor Mrs. Brathers had observed any of the blithe little drama involving a plan for Kenneth's next sweeping day spree was fully evident. Bromley's angular back was presented squarely to the rest of the 'bus; and the lady's eyes alternately met his with a soft lingering gaze, and dropped shyly to avoid them. Already, for each, none existed beyond the other. The affair was almost dangerously devoid of gradations. But such the Bromley epochs were coming more and more to be; no time frittered away over the preliminaries. For Bromley was getting on, and there might be no epochs in heaven. . . .

Once arrived at the Quai, the clattering 'bus was relinquished, and the three strolled pleasantly along near the river. Kenneth had a keen eye for the long line of open book-stalls and the polyglot shops opposite. It always seemed to Kenneth, whose soul delighted in sensational wickedness, that the profession of artful dodging must thrive along this serpentine Quai—so easy to gain access to the river on the one side, while on the other the shops offered such exhaustless opportunities for timely vanishings! However, the devoted couple in whose company he trudged had no thought to spend on idle and lawless themes.

Reaching the market, Mrs. Brathers proceeded at once, in a leisurely and authoritative fashion, to bargain. No novice was she, indeed, having spent too many winters in Paris ever to be fooled. In the art of making bargains she had grown expert. Long ago—possibly under the personal auspices of the lamented Timothy Brathers—a distinct method of attack

had been hit upon. It was her rule to offer exactly half of whatsoever price might be stipulated. Furthermore, nothing could induce her to relent one penny's worth. When Mrs. Brathers offered two francs and fifty centimes for a five-franc palm, it meant she would give just two francs fifty and no more. Not all the excited French—verbal, facial, and gesticulatory—could effect any sort of compromise. "I will give you exactly two francs fifty," she would say, with a firmness quite unlooked for in that sweet, weak little mouth of hers. If the merchant did not relent, she would actually trot right off to a fresh stall and begin all over again. Lacking both her patience and her innate love of bargaining, Mr. Bromley was inclined to be less radical. He had his own snug little economies. He would stand hours at a book-stall reading, thereby managing to duck the obligation of purchase. But when it came to flowers he never bothered about saving his pennies. Often enough, at his favourite stall by the Pont Carrousel, he did not even insist upon change! However, on the present occasion, of course, he very cheerfully echoed his companion's complaints that this plant was too small, that one not sufficiently hardy at the price, and that all were *beaucoup trop cher* at any price. Without demur—yes, with a seraphic smile—he loaded himself down out of all proportion to the lightening of her purse.

While this business was going forward, Kenneth turned aside a little, and walked about amongst the great and picturesque assortment of bloom. Yet he was not pondering the beautiful flowers at all. His thoughts were exclusively melodramatic. He liked to think himself a kind of modernised Diamond Dick. Suddenly his muscles stiffened, and a thrill stole quickly up his spine, losing and diffusing itself, after the manner of such thrills, through startled brain cells. For a hand had closed on his arm—a hand bony, forsooth, as Chinese chop sticks. It gripped tremendously, too, like a very stout-springed office paper-clip. Quickly Kenneth looked round. Close behind him stood a queer little shrunken lady garbed in many colours, whose face, upturned to his, was

heavily lined. She somewhat resembled an actress made up for Mother Ase. Her mouth was drawn tight and curveless. In her eyes, the blackest and most snapping he had ever beheld, there blazed a fierce, scorching inquiry.

"Sh-h-h!" she warned, laying one finger against her lips. "Come over here." And she pulled him, none too gently, behind a bit of awning which formed the rear wall of one of the flower stalls.

The woman spoke fairly intelligible English, but her accent was terrific and unmistakably Spanish. The whirring *r*'s and the curious Latin precision of vowel made even pleasant and otherwise quite innocuous speech with her seem speckled with minutely exploding dynamite. There were prodigious hisses, too, which either struck terror or simply set one's teeth on edge. When she had hauled her victim out of the general view, she drew up and faced him. All this while she had been tightly clenching his arm, as though fearful lest he escape her. Then she spoke very rapidly.

"Tell me—it is heem? That is Mr. Bromley you are with?"

Kenneth nodded, surprised beyond the realm of speech.

Yes, yesss. I never make a mistake with faces." And she pressed on rapidly: "The woman? Tell me, he is married to her?"

"Not yet!"

"Young man," she cried, seizing his arm again in the clip-like embrace of her fingers, "I can trust you? You will answer me on many things?"

Kenneth nodded with alacrity, but she gave him no time to speak. "Not here," commanded she, all in a hoarse and mysterious whisper. "It is that I desire no one shall overhear us. Come to me where I give you the address. See, I am going away from my hotel to a quiet place in the Latin Quarter. You will come?"

"I will come," said he obediently.

"To-morrow?"

"Yes—or right off now, if you like."

She shook her head, opened her bag, and selected a card.

Upon its back she scribbled something with the stub of a pencil, which went more frequently than was really necessary into her mouth. The stub, once yellow, was now gnawed a uniform wood colour. The open bag hung on her arm. From the bag oozed the decided odour of turnip. Yes, there could be no doubt of it. The odour bespoke the presence of turnip. Indeed, Kenneth was sure he caught sight of a morsel of that common vegetable. At length the lady reached an end to her laborious scribbling.

"There!" quoth she, presenting her card with the slight flourish which is a mannerism of all Europe. "You will come to-morrow?" Her *r's* rolled along gloriously.

"I'll be there!" he said with that air of assurance which implied, for the initiated, that, whatever the situation might prove, he was going to get his full share of fun—very possibly adventure—out of it. And he gave her his hand to seal the promise.

When they were done shaking hands the little Spanish lady melted away. In just a flashing instant she was gone, lost to sight completely. Then out of his pocket Kenneth drew the card she had given him. He scanned it quickly. On one side was the lady's name, cheaply printed: *Señorita Cassiendra Ferruco*. Kenneth turned the card over for the address to which she was moving and where on the morrow, she would receive and pump him.

In an almost helpless scrawl he read: "*Maison Bernard, No. — rue Jacob, near Boulevard Saint Germain.*"

CHAPTER EIGHT

BROMLEY'S ARM GOES TO SLEEP

THE marketing at length completed, Mrs. Brathers and the Vœuf, still, of course, wholly absorbed in each other, proceeded home again, choosing to walk, since, as she had observed when they were leaving the house, the air was so pleasantly mild and the sun so welcome. "Under the circumstances," declared Mrs. Brathers, "I think it would be a shame not to enjoy all this beauty." Her companion heartily agreed. But why it hadn't occurred to the lady to walk to the *marché* when they were quite unencumbered with purchases, and ride back, slipped into the category of life's mysteries and there lodged, defying extradition. Kenneth, excitedly crushing the Señorita's card in a pocketed fist, trotted good-naturedly along beside this devoted couple. He had plenty to think of—only fancy! She was coming to *live* with them!—and was glad to be ignored.

As they were passing the grim, huge Conciergerie, Mrs. Brathers began a long story about the unhappy Marie Antoinette, "who," sighed the widow, "spent such heavy days in one of those great towers—I never can remember which one;" a story that consumed nearly the whole of the time (with certain irrelevant digressions) and which was destined, after all, never quite to be finished.

Now it must, in this connection, be understood very clearly that Mr. Bromley was naturally an enormously talkative fellow. His supply of words was like Philemon's milk. Having travelled all over the civilized earth, he at length found himself in the rather enviable position of being able to look back, all the way, and declare that absolutely nothing of interest had escaped him. Upon every topic, from American politics

to the latest acquisition of the National Aquarium at Naples, he'd something, generally a great deal, to say. Bromley's pet-of-all was Greece, whither he had long ago been lured by fabulous tales of the wealth of antiquity there being brought to light. Of Greece he was forever talking; though when launched on the subject he always made haste to announce that it was the street cars of Athens which had from the first most impressed him. Ah, those wondrous street cars! No doubt it was the magic of the contrast that so held him. How he would dwell on their bonny bouncing across a city where there was once nothing but philosophy! "It is a wonderful sight," he would say, almost with tears in his pale eyes. For Greece was his darling, his predilection. Modern Greek he spoke quite fluently; though it is to be feared he could scarcely hope to get through Homer in the original. But anyway, what was Homer to the splendid street cars? It was his one perversity. On this topic, then, as on so many others, his normal flow was tremendous. And yet, in the direct *face* of it all, was Bromley silent now. It was his companion, almost equally travelled, who fully usurped the hour. Never did the defiant Antoinette receive so rosy or profuse a chronicling. Poor Bromley hadn't the ghost of a chance at Athens and its street cars the whole of the way. But he slipped his arm through hers—the disengaged arm—and found silence, under the circumstances, not too terrible.

Mrs. Brathers stood self-confessed as harbouring a passion for history. Of it, she assured every one, she had made a most particular study. Alas, though, like the pyramids of Egypt, Mrs. Brathers' knowledge of history, however lively it may once have been, stood now but a monument to vanished glory. Her present historic sense appeared much akin to poor Bromley's street cars, being woefully confined to the modern, and finding it possible but to run lightly over ground hallowed by age and rich with sacred dust. However learned she may once have been, one is forced to the conclusion that her mind had now long ceased to be minutely retentive, and that it inclined more to gilt edges and artistic editions. In short,

BROMLEY'S ARM GOES TO SLEEP 45

Mrs. Brathers' true joy was manifest in sidelights, the great central blaze having grown too lusty to be comfortably supported. Modern commentaries—these, now, were her chief delight. *Traits of Madame de Maintenon*, or perhaps *Women of the Court of Louis Quatorze*—especially if illustrated profusely with sepia engravings. Indeed, her devotion to modern habits of thought generally led her bit by bit to relegate “ancient” history to that shelf whereon the dust of disuse was never, never disturbed. Thus it was that her estimate *in toto* of the Romans had become this: that they were “fickle;” while the Greeks of antiquity were “graceful, but unromantic.”

“I once thought of pursuing a course in the old Greek philosophers,” she said. “Yes, I thought of it, indeed, quite seriously. But my rector advised me not to, since all that, he said, was *passé*, and besides might make me sceptical.”

As she now talked on and on (Bromley, of course, bestowing the very best sort of attention) Kenneth derisively sniffed the cool bright air. He gloried in his youth and the devil that was in him. The huge ease and consummate devotion to inconsequentiality displayed by the two in whose company he perforce trotted, made him wild for the perpetration of something undefined, yet withal shocking and disorganizing. He clutched the Señorita's card ever more firmly. They proceeded down the sunny Boulevard, rounding the ancient churchyard of Saint Germain des Près, and thus coming slowly and by degrees back again into rue Jacob. So seraphic was the usually solemn face of the Voeuf, it was certain there was surging within him something more than a Parisian appreciation, just then, of sunshine and blue sky. *Il fait beau temps s'il ne pleut pas!* But how much of Mr. Bromley's present cheerfulness depended upon an assimilation of this national virtue, and how much more may have been occasioned purely and simply by the presence of the lady on his arm, who was looking up to him so sweetly for protection, it would be hard to estimate. Certainly the dull weight of greenery and bloom which had long ago put the other arm to sleep couldn't be

reckoned responsible. Still, even if one chose to call this a *negative* influence, one would have at the same time to admit that it was utterly lost, overwhelmed, swallowed up in the multiple delights of the hour.

However, Kenneth—who naturally offered no interference—couldn't understand why he wasn't requisitioned to bear at least a fair portion of the floral load.

Bromley *was* unfathomable, after all.

CHAPTER NINE

SEÑORITA MOVES IN

THE "toute petite chamber" was a wondrous little nook—a nook, indeed, and nothing more than that—situated aloft, over the Bernard kitchen, in a kind of little attic. A queer sort of place in which to lodge a pensionnaire. Madame, of course, never offered it so long as there were more capacious and more conveniently located quarters disposable. Just now it chanced that the house was full. She was having a prosperous season. And Señorita Ferruco was anxious to settle in a nice, quiet home, just in this part of town, where her distracted nerves would be soothed. How long she would remain in Paris she couldn't say. She was in Paris on a very delicate and secret mission. Not all Madame's insinuations of tone and eyebrow could lure out the hidden facts. And Madame did so loathe secrets!

To-morrow was the day set for her taking up occupancy in the "toute petite," but Madame was surprised by a second call from the Señorita this afternoon. Eléonore had an awful time with the name, besides stumbling on the stairs leading up into the salon—through a freak of construction, set a good five feet above the dining room.

The little Spanish lady made known her errand. After all—she hesitated—it would perhaps be best not to come. She was sorry (Madame's eyebrows were going through quite violent gymnastics). But she had been thinking it over, and had reached the conclusion an hour ago that the "toute petite" would certainly prove too snug. She possessed trunks of huge dimensions, and it would be essential that they remain in her room. How she rolled her *r*'s telling of it, too! No, it wouldn't do to send them into storage. And Madame must admit that, even were they to succeed in getting the trunks up

the tiny stair out of the kitchen in the first place, there would be very little space left in the "toute petite" for other essentials, herself necessarily included. If only Madame had something else. . . .

Madame replied icily that though she regretted the circumstance very much, she must naturally be expected to know the geography and limitations of her own house. It would be pleasant to have a house without any limitations. But hers wasn't that kind. And her house was full—all but the "toute petite." She was quite haughty about it, for it always riled her to have arguments about issues that couldn't be altered. Nothing could be done, unless . . . *unless!* She had an idea. It was a quite startling and brilliant idea—an idea that struck Madame as admirably full of possibilities. There was Kenneth's room. H'm-m-m. Wasn't Kenneth merely a boy? What did he care about a few extra stairs? Of course Kenneth was supposed to be kept under the protecting wing of his guardian. Still, perhaps such a little way. . . . She cogitated it all swiftly. Well, she said, she would see. She began looking on her client with more hopeful gaze. "It is possible," she said, "that I can arrange something. At any rate, a *petit bleu* this evening. . . ."

Señorita Ferruco thanked her with Spanish profuseness and took her leave, well pleased.

All this occurred while the present incumbent of the larger chamber was drowsing through a *conférence* on comparative philosophy, and while Mr. Bromley and Mrs. Brathers, now grown bravely out of the swaddling clothes of their romance, were far *en ville* taking tea together.

In the salon, just prior to dinner, Madame put the proposition squarely up to Mr. Bromley, making sure that Kenneth was within earshot—since she knew well enough she could count on *him*. Of course Madame went about the matter adroitly as well as squarely, hinting, as was always expedient when financial perplexities arose, that she was a poor woman, after all, and really needed every available sou. This never failed to be a taking tone with Madame.

"And the lady," who remained mysteriously unnamed, "says she cannot come at all if I've nothing but the 'toute petite' to offer." Yes, Madame knew how to be wistful.

As for Kenneth—of course, as she knew he would, he fell right for it at once. He had investigated the "toute petite," just as he had long ago pried into every corner of the entire Bernard establishment, and knew what incomparable avenues of escape the "toute petite" afforded. Then, too, it's being right over the kitchen was a further recommendation, this location bringing it into such a very convenient proximity to the pastry boxes. Oh, yes—from the beginning Kenneth was altogether in favour of the move.

At first, on the other hand, as was only to be expected, Mr. Bromley inclined to hold off, making a very tremendous thing indeed of his "responsibility under the law," and fearing, he said, that "all influence of wise restraint would be removed in the event of such a separation." However, after dinner he felt in a much more compromising mood; especially since Madame had seen to it that the wine was not diluted to-night. After all, they would still be under the same roof. And when Kenneth triumphantly reminded him of the tinkling bell, and suggested that a new combination could be added to the code of signals, that settled the thing entirely. It was the tinkling bell which really turned the tide.

"What shall we make it?" asked Mr. Bromley with anxious and quite eager solemnity, "four very long ones? Or how would three short and two long be?"

Next day was cleaning day in Maison Bernard: a most awful and tyrannical event, sparing no one at all, driving everything before it, like some dread cataclysm of nature. And when the dust was thickest in the stormy air, a great additional stir was occasioned by the arrival of Señorita Ferruco and her trunks. The procession passed along through the hall, across the dining room, up the half flight, past the door of the Voef, and finally turned into the room adjoining, Madame screaming in the wake like a steam-inspired calliope. Mr.

Bromley, of course, was wisely out of it all. He knew what *nettoyage général* meant, and always planned a long visit in town, or some pleasant hours in the Bois. To Mrs. Brathers he had considerably communicated the horrors, and she had readily fallen in with his suggestion that they give the house a wide berth—together.

The new Epoch was now beautifully launched. They drove first to the Luxembourg in a taxi of Mr. Bromley's hailing; and so deep was he by this time in his *ardeur* that he bade the vehicle wait, quite regardless of cost. In a very leisurely manner they strolled through the gallery, Mr. Bromley supporting her with his arm; or she, bereaved lady, slipping an arm ever so confidently through his. And then they quitted the Luxembourg, skipping out through the rain to their taxi, and crossing over to the Grand Hôtel du Palais-Royal, where they partook of *déjeuner*, and where, fortunately, the taxi this time did not wait.

Meanwhile, Maison Bernard by degrees set itself right. The raised dust settled for another week. The Spanish lady went humming about her new domicile, pinning up sundry trinkets, shrouding her partially disgorged trunks under brilliant shawls, and all the while gnawing on a white turnip, which she would take up and lay down, suiting exigencies, much as a shoemaker takes up and lays down his mallet and shears.

Déjeuner in Maison Bernard was sparsely attended this tempestuous November day. Kenneth knew quite as well as anyone that housecleaning meant leftovers and no dessert. So he wisely ducked too, and employed the occasion to try out the progressive luncheon which his friend of the omnibus had charted on the back of a calling card. It worked to perfection. He had a bully time, and kept well out of the way of the arrogant brooms. This left only three women to draw up to the red-and-white-checked tablecloth and munch leftovers and no dessert, mostly in silence. The Señorita now had the seat of honour, at Madame's right, while across the board, toward the other end, sat Miss Curtis, looking very

much preoccupied behind her defiant "sure-ons." It wasn't an hilarious meal.

When it was finished Miss Curtis went back to her atelier. Madame resumed the shrill tyranny over her servants, later dressing up and going demurely to call on some relations in the rue de l'Université.

Señorita Ferruco retired to the privacy of her room alongside Mr. Bromley's, where she went humming about, pinning up some more souvenirs and beginning on a fresh turnip. The door which had always stood open between the two rooms was now grimly locked on both sides. Who lived next door? Señorita didn't know.

She settled down quite cosily. And there was a queer sort of ironic fate discernible in this newly evolved situation. For the lady thus lodged in the snug private corridor, just next door, had once been dear Bromley's wife.

The humour of the situation was indeed quite exquisite. That they should have met some day, casually, on a street or in the theatre, would seem ample; but that she should have managed instead to get herself set down in the exclusive small corridor, directly next door, really exceeded the most perfect satanic vagary. Of course she had been, in a way, an accomplice to all this. She had met the odd twist of destiny half way. Almost the first face she had seen upon arriving in Paris was the face of Albert Bromley. It had stared out vacantly from under the awning of a quiet little sidewalk café. But it had not spotted her. Then she saw him again one day in the Bois. And vague schemes of vengeance and rapine began forming within her brain. For the alimony was all spent long ago. . . .

At last she had succeeded in tracking him home. The evening when he read so absorbedly in the lemon volume at the little book stall in rue Jacob, she had crouched and watched. Then Kenneth had come along, and she had followed them stealthily to the courtyard gate. There could hardly be any doubt of its being his gate. Yet after all it

was only a gate, with a number over it. The house to which the gate belonged, like all Parisian houses, was divided up into a considerable number of apartments, each apartment, in its own turn, achieving the dignity of a separate maison. How did she know in which of the several maisons her former husband dwelt? How did she know if he didn't perhaps possess an entire maison himself? Perhaps he was long ago married again. Perhaps this boy in the *pèlerine* was Mr. Bromley's son. It made her all at once feel very old and very tired. She knew nothing about his life since they parted. They had become utter strangers.

The *concierge*. Of course. Yet she must not arouse suspicion. Being so suspicious of everybody and everything, the Señorita was naturally very careful to avoid arousing suspicion herself. She had merely knocked at the door of the *concierge* and inquired about pensions. Was there a pension in the building? Oh, yes, it seemed, there were two or three. And he named them off. She chose one at random. It did not matter which one. So long as she could settle in the immediate vicinity and watch. What would come of it all she could not say. But it was maddening to see him so care-free and prosperous. No doubt he was very rich. Yes, she must install herself where she could watch. When the time came to make herself known she must be on hand. And she had chosen Maison Bernard, partly because she liked the name, and partly because Maison Bernard was clear at the top of the house, and would thus be more remote than any of the others. And having selected Maison Bernard, but objecting to the solitary room at her disposal, she had, all unwittingly, manœuvred herself right next door to Bromley's room. And here she was, and this was why the whole situation was so piquant.

CHAPTER TEN

FUR FLIES

KENNETH, reaching home somewhat ahead of his guardian, went straight through the kitchen and up the narrow little winding flight to his new quarters. There everything was just as he had left it. No kind fairy had stepped in during his absence to set things right. Inanimate pandemonium. Ties and collars everywhere. He sighed. He never knew till now how many he had. His clothes lay all about in heaps, while in the white crockery wash bowl were dumped books, pencils, handkerchiefs, oranges, and a toothbrush. But in the thick of this confusion he refused to be baffled. Up here amongst the gables and chimney pots Mirth had her palace, and they were wedded, he and she.

When Mr. Bromley and Mrs. Brathers returned from their long dissipation they, also, retired to their respective rooms; and a moment later Kenneth descended, intending to coax shy of the cheerless obligation of trotting all the way to the Sorbonne for a *conférence* at five o'clock and a half. However, when he reached the foot of the half flight leading up out of the dining room, he heard high voices and ducked behind a convenient curtain for the purpose of knowing his ground before he trod it.

Naturally, his first awful thought was that the Voeuf and Mrs. Brathers were having, thus early in the game, a fatal falling out. But the female voice, though it indeed spoke English, was not the voice of Scranton. It was proving an abomination, so far as English went, such as Scranton could never be held guilty of. For instead of Mrs. Brathers—yes—it was the very lady who had pounced upon him the morning previous at the flower market! Bromley, then, had

got ahead of him. It gave his ego a little unpleasant twitch, for he couldn't endure having anyone, ever, under any conditions, get ahead of him.

However, the deed was now accomplished, and too late to mend. They had emerged from their respective doors at one and the same hell-timed moment.

"My God!" she screamed in Mr. Bromley's face, though her tone negatived any possible suspicion that she at all mistook him for the Deity.

"Good God!" returned Mr. Bromley, his arms falling very limp at his sides, and his eyes staring exactly like a madman's.

Now, this was strong language for Mr. Bromley. He was almost never known to refer to the Most High—not even to the Most Low. Upon just one other occasion, at least since coming to Paris, had Mr. Bromley said "Good God!" That was shortly after they had settled in Maison Bernard and he first caught sight of the singer downstairs in the garden. How bound up with mysterious women Mr. Bromley's destiny seemed to be! It was taking Paris to bring the awful truths to light.

Señorita Ferruco, sometime Mrs. Albert Bromley, shrank back till she came in contact with the door casing, where she halted and clung, her hands behind her grasping the woodwork. If Mr. Bromley looked like an owl, this lady certainly looked like a witch. There they were. And it seemed impossible, somehow, to connect the destinies of these two. She glared at him, undecided what to do next; and he just leaned against his own doorpost, his arms limp at his sides, his mouth agape with stupefaction. Strange and terrible thoughts played helter-skelter in his brain—irrelevant thoughts, too, such as why the man who papered the opposite wall didn't fit the strips more snugly together; or had the paper shrunk when the paste was dry? But what troubled him as much as anything was the startling ease with which he had recognized Cassiendra, after all these years. Certainly she was an altered being. In a crowd he would have been sure, or at least tolerably sure, not to place her at all. At most

he would have been arrested momentarily in passing by her colourful queerness. Yet here in the little corridor, as they both emerged from their doors and suddenly faced each other, the recognition was instant. He just seemed to *feel* that this woman was his former wife. It was almost like an unhappy case of intuition. But as one looked at her more closely one detected, too, a certain something which had been in her face all along—a lingering token, it might be, of her far away youth, like a little ghost or pale shadow of other days.

After Mr. Bromley had said "Good God," it began to look as though he would never speak again. But the lady recovered herself, by degrees.

"So," she hissed, seeming slowly metamorphosed from a witch into a wild cat. An antiquated wild cat, if you will. And one that had seen better days. But still a wild cat.

And he? Well, in the face of this alarming transfiguration, Mr. Bromley just remained a sadly frightened owl. His wings seemed clipped. It was like a nightmare. He did not say anything at all. He tried, but couldn't. No, he simply couldn't.

"How I hoped not to see your face, ever any more!" she magnificently lied. "When I see you, all the past comes back. We *hate*, who have hot blood in our veins! We who come from Spain are not like the cold of the north. You love not the same way. You are all Eskeermaux in the United States. I know you and your people better now. You love, you say. You marree. Zeep! It is gone—like that!"

The words came sizzingly and breathily and, withal, wheezily. Her teeth flashed at him with terrible defiance; though how much of the intrinsic terror must have been dispersed for Mr. Bromley, could he have known that they came out regularly at night, one may estimate to suit one's own conception of the probable.

She quite shook with her esteemed Spanish passion. A moment ago nothing quite like this encounter had occurred to her. But directly their doors had opened and she stood there confronted by the fact that she had miraculously blundered into the very house with him, the little Spanish lady, obeying

some cryptic instinct or other, had decided upon a temporary reign of terror. The instinct which she thus extemporaneously obeyed counseled her that prestige would somehow develop out of wrath. And, once ignited, the flame of reproach soon blazed beyond control.

While Mr. Bromley opened and closed his mouth, shifted about on his feet, and said nothing, she continued: "I was too *hot*! You liked not my countree so well when you stayed on and on. You came, as a tourist, to see strange sights, and you marreed me! You marreed me in the Catholeec Church. Oh yes—you joined so you could marree me. Then you were excommuneecated. Our Catholeec Church—it does not rrrecognize deevorce. You were tired of your Spanish bride already on the honeymoon! Why did you marree me then? I was young and innocent. I did not know how you loved, you Eskeemaux, in the United States. In Spain we have hearts. We love, verree much. I was young, and you put a rrring on my finger. We were in the moonlight, many nights. You said Rossetti should have painted me. You talked about stars and the rrroses behind my head. You see, I do not forget anything. You saw only a pecture, and I thought you had fallen in love with me! Bah! I do not forget any of it. It is many years, and we meet again. Now you have grey hair on your face. That is the way Eskeemaux should be! Their hearts are as cold as the tombstones!"

By this time she stood up quite close to poor Mr. Bromley. Her hands were clenched in front of his face. But during her long speech Mr. Bromley had gradually got hold of himself. To say that by the time she finished speaking he felt no further terror would be a grave exaggeration. But he began to revive. At length he found his voice. And as he spoke, the sound of his voice patted and encouraged in him a sense of righteous disregard.

There was none of the Latin in Mr. Bromley. She would, quite naturally, scream at him about stars and rrroses, about Eskeemaux and deevorce and the Catholeec Church. But he replied, at first in a rather scared and groping manner, to the

effect that since there had been so grave a mistake—"I was young too," he reminded her—everything had really turned out for the best. Obviously they couldn't have gone on living together. She had her alimony. It had been quite voluntary—and quite generous, too. What further hold had she on him? She must remember that he was a lawyer once and knew all about these things. He had served his term in Reno and procured an honest divorce. She mustn't be unreasonable. She must try to look at both sides.

In short, Mr. Bromley grew more confident as the first shock of the encounter wore off. Finally, indeed, he found it possible to maintain his balance without further assistance from the doorpost.

"In Spain we hate when we do not love!"

But the Voef was so far recovered by this time as to seize the handle of his door. He swung his door wide open, but not, it developed, for purposes of escape. "Please step in here," he requested, inviting her with a gesture. "The whole house will know of it at this rate, and there isn't any need of making a public scandal, I hope."

His voice was still slightly nervous, but it had already something of the matter-of-fact, even the street-cars-of-Athens twang to it. He became once more smooth, cultured, self-possessed—almost grand. He seemed none the worse for his fright. But the dreadful voice of his Spanish widow must be silenced. Yes, Mr. Bromley was polite. But firm. It no longer bothered him that the strips of wall paper didn't quite meet. Would she not remember that they were now well along in years; that he had himself secured the divorce, thus relieving her of any possible Catholic embarrassment in the matter—would she not, in brief, be *sensible*?

These were, indeed, perfectly logical and supremely gentlemanly requests he was making; and they proved, in the end, of more avail than her Spanish passion. She was all fire. But under the deluge of Mr. Bromley's collected coolness the fire died quickly down. The fists of the quivering little woman dropped. A look of petitioning defeat stole into her eyes.

And it was she, now, who stood silent. When he repeated the gesture which invited her to enter the room and discuss their dilemma in a dignified, businesslike way, the Señorita turned her head in a bewildered manner. She looked into and all about his room. Then she turned back to him again. But she did not say anything at all. And suddenly she began crying. Her hands went over her face. She cried as she loved and she cried as she hated. Then she ran quickly into her own room, closing the door, and, after a moment, locking it.

Mr. Bromley stood looking at the closed door. He stroked his nicely trimmed beard. Then he rested both hands on his projecting hips, cocking his large head over on to one side—just exactly the way a bird does when it wonders whether things are really what they seem.

Presently a hand went up and scratched that same head—not at all after the Latin fashion, but quite slowly and gravely. It was pensive and gentle. It was the sad scratch of perplexity.

"This beats the Old *Harry*!" he told himself.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE MIGHTY HUNTER

SAD Eléonore came up to the door of the "toute petite" with a note. "*Voilà, monsieur.*" She handed it to the person whose name appeared on the envelope. Then she turned woodenly about and thumped back down the tiny winding stair to the kitchen.

Now, Kenneth was not accustomed to receiving unstamped missives. It was rather an unusual thing for him to receive any missive at all, for his friends were mostly informal friends who didn't, as a general thing, write. The envelope which Eléonore handed in wasn't even a *petit bleu*. It hadn't passed through any system of mails at all. In a word, it was from Mlle. Cyprienne downstairs. From Mlle. Cyprienne—and in English.

"She's learned my name somehow!" he thought excitedly.

Yes, there it was, perfectly clear and unmistakable! Monsieur Kenneth Bayard. He tore open the envelope, and inside found more of the attractive handwriting covering the first page and half of the second.

"Monsieur," ran the communication, "I left you so abruptly that I have since feared you may have thought me displeased. Nothing could be further from the truth. You asked if you might come to see me. I'm driving late this afternoon, and thought you might care to come along. No need to send word. If you'd like to, let me meet you at Marguerite's (the hair-dresser's—rue Castiglione, just off Place Vendôme). I'll be through there at four o'clock, and we can drive till dark."

He stuffed the invitation into his pocket in a very cool, even careless manner. Then all at once he threw his *pélerine* about him, reached down his French cap from a peg, and went out, a true Parisian, into a very typical Parisian autumn morn-

ing. The boy tramped happily and excitedly all about the familiar Latin neighbourhood. "Just think of a drive with Mlle. Cyprienne of the Opéra!" He fumbled the note in his pocket. Later he noticed that his fingers were faintly touched with the paper's perfume. Not a common scent. Still, it seemed half familiar, too. Oh, well—some lady or other. Could it have been the lady at the Folies? Hardly. He smiled. "Her perfume was ever so much more pronounced. I think it was carnation!"

Kenneth chanced, just at that moment, to be passing under the walls of the palace built by Constantine Chlorus—mere crumbling fragments of walls, now, flanking the always congested Boulevard Saint Michel. He squinted in passing into an ancient garden full of archæological débris—antiquity's dustpan; and for a moment, in passing, was conscious of the thrill of the contrast. Between the fragmentary relics of Roman occupancy, so forlorn under the drip of fog, and this warm perfumed invitation from a singer at the Opéra—what chasms!

And he sped along, glad that the past was past, leaping with the confused, enkindling throb of contemporary life.

At considerably prior to four o'clock Kenneth stood, eager and watchful, before the door of Marguerite's in rue Castiglione. Her carriage was waiting, too, and he chatted easily with his friend the *cocher*.

Promptly at the hour she had specified, Mlle. Cyprienne appeared. She smiled a welcome, and a moment later they were sitting side by side in the carriage. The old driver descended from his perch and tucked a heavy polar bear rug about their feet. Then a whip was cracked imperiously in the air, and they were off, a singer from the Opéra and a lad who, judging from his garb, might be any of about a thousand French students—but who was, actually, and despite appearances, merely Kenneth, of Maison Bernard.

The melancholy fog with which each day of the increasingly wintry season emerged shrouded was, by this hour, so nearly

dispersed as to permit of a grudging and rather watery shine. Even a little faint blue was discernible overhead.

"Shall we drive as far as the Bois?" she asked, using their native tongue now.

Her companion expressed his entire approval.

"Out along the Boulevard des Capucines and rue Saint Honoré? And back down the Champs Elysées?"

Oh, yes—her companion quite approved, and settled to the unqualified pleasure of the ride with this singer from the Opéra.

It was hardly to be wondered at that he should have experienced a sensation of pride in connection with his privilege; for Mlle. Cyprienne was almost, or had at least once been, a good deal of a beauty. Her eyes were brown—he glanced up obliquely to make sure; yes, they were brown, as he remembered them from the night he and the singer had stood together under a flicker of gas in the hall. Brown, and keen—yet soft, too. Sometimes quite electric with enthusiasm and feeling, but never abandoning a sort of shadowy serenity. . . . Keeness, softness, pallor—the picture must be impressionistic to do her justice. Still, if one cared to linger a little over details, it might not be amiss to register the glancing notice of a mouth, artistic and sensitive—perhaps just a shade too sensitive; but not, even when linked in one's mind with that faint note of passion struck out of the moulded entirety of her, sufficient ever to throw over the balance of a singularly well balanced nature.

Her young companion this afternoon did not by any means go to such pains in estimating the component and synthetic traits of Mlle. Cyprienne, singer at the Opéra. He was perfectly content just to be driving along through Paris beside a handsome woman.

"I believe we ought to get on quite well together," she said.

"Oh, yes," he assured her, then was silent.

"Little as you might think," she went on, "mine is a very lonely life. I really see almost no one, except, of course, all those people 'out front' when I sing."

"You haven't any friends in Paris, then?"

"Very few."

"Strange!"

"You think so?"

"I was only thinking how many friends I have—of one sort and another."

"I'd like to know about your friends," she said, rather deftly making the issue of her own comparative solitude serve as a means of drawing him out. . . .

"Of course, as I say," he enlarged, "they're all sorts."

"You make friends easily, perhaps?"

He shrugged. "How can I help it? They seem to be everywhere. I don't look for them. They just pop in sight."

"And you call them all friends rather than acquaintances?"

"Well, yes. I call them friends. Because, of course, they *are*."

"I wonder if you'll add me to your long, long list."

"Oh, I did—ever so long ago."

"Really? But we've known each other *so* short a time."

His answer was superb. "I'd seen you at your window."

As they neared the Bois, she sat looking off across woodland and water with vaguely kindled eyes.

"You're a very nice sort of person, aren't you?"

He thanked her with a kind of little-boy smirk. But he added more seriously: "I'm sure you're ever so much nicer."

This frank interchange of sentiment carried them forward some way on a warm and quite pleasant silence. When the Avenue du Bois de Bologne was reached, she told the driver to turn back toward the city. After a while they came to the Place de l'Etoile, and were presently descending the broad Champs Elysées.

"I've so often wondered"—she hesitated—"whether the elderly gentleman I've seen you with—"

But Kenneth fancied he knew what she would say, and he laughed, so gaily that pedestrians turned to look. "No, no, he's not my father. That's Mr. Bromley—my guardian."

"H'm-m-m—Mr. Bromley."

"You don't happen to know him?"

"I once knew a Mr. Bromley," she admitted. "A great many years ago. But he wasn't quite like your Mr. Bromley. My Mr. Bromley was a little—how shall I say it?—well, just a little less *dignified*." Then she looked vaguely regretful, as though, perhaps, she had gone rather too far. "So he's your guardian."

The boy nodded.

"You've no family at all?"

"Not so you could notice it," he replied lightly. "But never having known what it was to have a family, I naturally get on pretty well without one. I don't think much about it, you see. There isn't any use. There used to be times when I wondered about it all quite a lot. I don't know how often I've asked Mr. Bromley what became of my family. But he always fidgets so. If you could just see Mr. Bromley fidget once, you'd understand why I'm never going to ask him any more. It's no use trying to get a thing out of him. Once when I was home for Christmas vacation I asked him whether my father and mother were in a wreck, or something like that. And he said yes. But he spoke so stupidly that I never believed him. And then what do you think he did? Arranged with the faculty so I wasn't to get home for Easter!"

"Sometimes it seems an almost terrible world," she said thickly, with an air of having been engaged with her own thoughts.

"But it's quite pleasant, don't you think?"

He was eager to steer the talk into more cheerful channels, and glanced down, the fur robe giving him an idea.

"Isn't it a polar bear?" he inquired.

"Yes," she answered. And then, looking dreamily off along the row of now bleak and deserted refreshment booths, she added: "You see, I had a friend—he was a mighty hunter."

"Did he shoot the bear in Alaska?" Kenneth wanted to know.

"I'm not sure whether it was Alaska or Siberia. I've ever so many more at home."

"He must have given *all* his trophies to you!"

"He gave me—oh, more furs than you could count thrice on the fingers of both hands."

Kenneth whistled. "I guess all hunters aren't so generous as that!"

"Yes," she said softly, "he was very generous. I never knew him to be other than most generous." And then she added: "If you like I'll show you them all!"

"Oh, they're here in Paris?"

"Yes."

"When you said 'home' I thought you meant—well, somewhere else."

"America?"

He nodded.

And then she laughed. "I'm afraid with me it's home, now, here—or wherever I happen to be. I've become a kind of permanent tramp."

But wasn't he also? They laughed together over it, and then grew half wistful.

Dusk came on quite rapidly. Lamps were being lighted. The smell of roasting chestnuts was in the cold air at many a corner. Now they were in the smart bustle of the rue de Rivoli, where the old driver found it expedient to sit up even straighter. And now they were passing the Tuileries, and now they were crossing the Pont Royal.

"I would ask you in for some tea and *gâteaux*," she said, only there's work to-night."

"Thanks anyway, for the ride," said he. "And if I may, I'll come to tea some other time."

Her door opened, and she was passing within; but Kenneth, taking the steps two at a time, turned and called back down to her: "Don't forget your promise—to show me all the spoils of the mighty hunter!"

She smiled and nodded. "There are tigers as well as bears—and even a lion; so you'd better not put it off too long!"

"You'll see!" he flashed back at her, laughing.

CHAPTER TWELVE

AN IMPORTANT COMMUNICATION

THAT the Señorita had no actual hold on Mr. Bromley did not greatly mitigate the poignancy of the situation. It was sheer melodrama. Strategically see how secure she was! For the epoch was yet of tender age; and poor Bromley knew how little it might take to upset an epoch. Mrs. Brathers simply must not know. Nothing in life possessed quite the importance of this fact that the truth must be kept from her. It did not so much matter whether the nations went to war, or even whether half the mechanism of the entire universe got out of gear. Mrs. Brathers must not know about this ominous relationship. Were Mr. Bromley's own peace and especially his status to be maintained, in fact, nobody in the house must know. Señorita must be implored to hold her tongue. If necessary she must be bribed. That failing. . . . But Mr. Bromley did not like to think of violence—even in the defence of an epoch.

The divorce was recorded in some dusty old office, though the ink would be presumably much faded by now, and the page a yellowing one. He had left her, left the Church. He had gone back to the Baptists, and felt more at home. And he had spent a long sad year in Reno. After that he had been free. But was he quite free now?

Señorita did not appear at dinner on the day of her terrible scene with Bromley. Neither did she appear at all during the evening, nor the next day. This simplified things a good deal, although the terror of the Voeuf (lest she suddenly bound in) may perhaps be better imagined than delineated. Kenneth, of course, while he hoped she *would* bound in, held the secret close. This was too valuable a secret to be frittered

away or expended in anti-climax. He meant to commercialize it, of course, when the occasion offered. It was enough, for the present, to know what power he possessed, now and forevermore, over his poor, solemn guardian.

So the Epoch mellowed and deepened.

On Sunday the Señorita again behaved beautifully. She announced that she was going up to Montmartre to spend the day. She would not return till evening. "*Très bien*," replied Madame, who mentally began curtailing the necessary supplies which must go to the making of dinner. Señorita went, without even speaking to Mr. Bromley, which was very rude, because Madame had taken great pains to introduce them and express the hope that they might prove congenial neighbours.

Following the return of the Spanish widow from Montmartre, Bromley tapped gently upon the door which stood sentinel between their two rooms. He knew her to be within. He could distinctly hear her. She was going calmly about the further tacking up of trinkum-trankums, appearing to have forgotten completely, in this engrossing matter of mural decorations, that she had a one-time husband next door. Still, though Señorita was obviously in her chamber, she emitted no response to Mr. Bromley's tapping. The detonation of hammer against tack, however came to an abrupt stop. There was silence—a silence so complete as to be undisturbed by even the habitual gnawing of turnip.

Mr. Bromley waited, somewhat at sea as to what he ought to do now, and scratched his militant hair.

"Cassienda!" he called out at length softly, tapping with his fingers on the panel. There was nothing but silence. He tapped again. His attitude was superbly deferential. "Cassienda!" It was a hoarse, imploring whisper.

Finally she answered. "What do you want with me?"

The Voeuf was so very much startled at hearing the voice of his divorced wife in the midst of so solemn a stillness that for a moment he really forgot what it was he did want of

her. On his own side of the door there hung a brief reticence. Then he recovered and said: "Will you please let me come in a minute? I want to speak with you about something."

"But I do not wish to speak with you!" (Something told her she could risk holding out a little longer.)

"I have a favour to ask. . . ."

"A fine one to ask of me favours!"

"I know—I know—but one last favour, and then I promise never to approach you again in any way."

"I was your wife, and you would not have me! When you were tired you skipped away! Now you come to me again, and you want to ask me will I do you a favour!"

"But it is not a great one. It is a very, very little favour indeed."

"You have broken my heart!"

She began sobbing, and Bromley's dismayed ears further caught the sound of a heavy collapse upon the bed.

"Listen a moment," he implored. "Open the door, won't you please? Let me come in just a minute."

Señorita sat up. She swung her feet to the floor, perching defiantly on the edge of the bed. The flood of grief snapped short. Two shining rows of teeth came together, click. The lady spoke through them.

"No, I won't! I won't!"

"Only for just a minute," Bromley pleaded. "I've unbolted the door on my side."

"Then you will bolt it again!"

Bromley considered. The face she refused to look upon was never more owl-like than just at this moment. Never before had it appeared quite so pathetically troubled. Presently, however, his look brightened a little, and he said:

"Well, then, never mind. You needn't open the door. It isn't necessary for me to come in. Listen, Cassiendra. We can talk just as well through the panels."

This may be thought of as perhaps already axiomatic. However, even in view of the concession on his part, she refused to become more amiable.

"No, I don't wish to talk to you," she scolded. But presently her anger began to subside. The Señorita was a woman. After all, she possessed her share of the proverbial curiosity. "Well?" she faltered at last.

"I just wanted to ask you," he hastened on, quite cheerfully, "if you'd mind keeping our little affair a—well a secret."

She weighed it while she reached into her bag for a turnip. "You mean we should continue to pass as strangers?"

"In this house, yes."

"Ah, it is like you to ask that! Once you love, then you want to deny!"

"But since we're here together in this house, don't you see how awkward—"

"Ah, that is what men hate," she moralized with shrewd bitterness, "—to be awkward!" And then she added: "But you needn't be so troubled about it. I will never reveal what a fool I have been!"

Mr. Bromley didn't quite relish having it put just this way. It had a very blunt sound. Still, her assurance, if it had its inherent humiliation, was emphatically to be prized. "I knew you'd be obliging," he said.

"Oh, yes," she returned with cruel expansion, "you need not fear. I would never let the world see how a poor girl was betrayed by a donkey!"

A flush spread over Mr. Bromley's sad face. He turned away from the door. Albert Bromley had never been called a donkey to his face before. He went about deploring it. It was a terrible thing, he thought, to be called a donkey. Well—his large, homely face (which honestly did resemble that of a donkey just a wee tiny bit) brightened with a hopeful if slightly wan smile—there was at least one tender and responsive soul who would never, never call him that. And, all in all, the future, it must be admitted, appeared greatly simplified.

As Mr. Bromley recollected the drawn bolt on his side of the door and turned to slide it back into its socket, he silently blessed the lady beyond the panels, though she had wounded him very deeply.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE SECRET MISSION

P*ETIT déjeuner* in Maison Bernard was, at best, a hurried hit-and-miss affair. Rarely did all the household assemble simultaneously. As a matter of fact, it was not required that there should be any strict uniformity about sitting down. It was absolutely required, however, that the table should be vacated at a given moment. There were no leeways. The table was cleared on the dot. If one had breakfasted, well and good. If one had not yet breakfasted, or if one had just sat down to it, or still again if one happened to be right in the midst of things, one was, in the parlance of the doughboy, out of luck. When the time was up, off the checkered tablecloth would be whisked, back the chairs would be hurled against the wall, up windows would be flung. Doors would commence slamming, and dust would come pouring out of the salon (if it chanced to be a sweeping day). The servants would come clattering in from the kitchen: cook with a slate for Madame's market order, the *femme de chambre* bearing buckets and bound for a tour of indefinite mopping and slopping. Therefore, it decidedly paid an inmate to rise in the morning when bidden.

As a rule Kenneth was the first one to reach the table. Frequently he breakfasted quite alone and was off for the day before any one else had appeared. This morning he would have breakfasted alone as usual but for Señorita Ferruco, who had counted on getting in sufficiently early to avoid the entire household. This was the first time she and Kenneth had been alone together since her arrival.

It was a new day, full of untried possibilities. He was young, life was beautiful, and this was Paris. "Good morning!" he said brightly.

She returned the salute in her half timid, half stiletto fashion, her black eyes flashing like jet on a Victorian ball gown. She bent down low over her indifferent coffee and single *petit pain*.

"We little thought," he continued chattily, "the day we met at the market—"

"I do not wish to speak of that!" she interrupted petulantly.

Her English was perhaps, upon the whole, rather better than her French; though the difference was not essentially greater than that sometimes thought of as existing between suicide and murder.

"I wish you shall forget that we ever have been meeting at the *marché*!"

"But I can't," he protested, insisting upon being uncompromisingly literal. "Not in a thousand years."

"Then you will not speak of it," she bargained, gulping the remainder of her coffee hurriedly and preparing to depart. The poor little untouched roll she stuffed into her bag. There it reposed beside a half consumed white turnip. She would finish her breakfast when less harassed by bitter circumstance.

But he was decidedly unwilling she should make her escape so easily. "You don't want it known that you and Mr. Bromley. . . . ?"

She smote him with the dagger of her glittering eye. "What is that you are saying?" she muttered darkly.

"Why, you know," he replied, "you grabbed my arm like the devil. And you asked the most personal questions about Mr. Bromley. Why, a fellow would just naturally suppose—"

"You will not speak about that now," she interrupted, looking nervously about the room and gradually edging away. "It was a meesake. I was misled by what you call a likeness. That is the end, and you will say no more about it."

"If you don't mind," confided Kenneth very seriously, stirring his chocolate, "I'd something important to tell you."

"No, no—not here!" she cried. For steps were heard afar off in the *salle d'attente*. If you must say anything, come

with me." And away she sped, up the stairs into the little corridor shared now by herself and the Voef.

Kenneth concluded his breakfast at a swallow and hurried off after her. He tiptoed past the door of the Voef, whom he could hear within, fumbling about and grumbling a good deal under his breath. The door of the Señorita he found closed, but it opened a crack as he approached and stood expectantly before it. Beyond the crack he perceived a keen black eye. Slowly the crack widened. The tip of a nose and a thin line of lips grew visible. A finger lay across the line, eloquently if restrictedly cautioning silence. Kenneth nodded to show he understood and could be trusted. Presently the crack widened still a little more, and Kenneth slipped through.

Quickly and noiselessly she closed the door, her bony hand remaining a long time on the knob, and letting it very gently turn back till the metallic point of repose was reached. Then she whipped about and stood crouching against the door, her eyes full of defiant shafts, as though, having lured in a victim, she now dared that victim to attempt escape. Her narrow, flat bosom rose and fell, the impression conveyed being that of a woman almost beside herself with some terrific stress of emotion. And yet it would be rather hard to say exactly what the Señorita was so enormously excited about.

Kenneth, who stood watching her from the opposite side of the room, and about whose mouth quivers of mirth were at play, made as though to speak. But the convulsed Señorita raised her hands high above her head. Her flinty eyes narrowed; her face took on an expression of half frenzied warning; her lips formed the hissing "Sh!" which the breath merely sketched. He stood quite still. She came toward him on tiptoe, her head shaking a steady reproof, her finger again laid on her drawn lips.

Not a word was spoken for fully five minutes, which, under such circumstances as these, is a span that may appear prolonging itself unto an eternity. Señorita made motions in the direction of Bromley's room, signifying it was on his

account, as one would naturally assume, that all this tense silence was urgent. Kenneth smiled, hoped his prim guardian wouldn't linger everlastingly over the details of his toilet, and dropped quietly down into a chair to wait for the ban to be raised.

Señorita, however, did not sit. She paced nervously about. It was not essential, one sees, that *she* remain quiet. She had a right to do as she pleased in her own room. Kenneth watched her with great interest. She paid no attention to him, but went about patting things, even tacking up a few more curious Spanish trinkets. To be one instant inactive was a thing of which she seemed incapable. Kenneth watched her. But so long as the Voëuf was next door her young visitor did not exist for the Señorita.

It was with the greatest difficulty Kenneth was able to recognize his old quarters. It seemed as though nothing remained except the dimensions. During his occupancy the room was comparatively empty. Now it was stuffed full. An air of throbbing mystery pervaded it. It was quite fascinating. What an invasion! Wherever glance of eye might venture, there were festoons of gay ribbons and shawls. The native hue of the room—the hue, that is, bestowed by Madame in the beginning—was a neutral dun. But there was nothing neutral any longer. War was declared. Faction clashed with faction. The Reds challenged the Oranges. The Pinks carried all before them, till certain purples were encountered in the dazzling plush counterpane on the bed. The room writhed with the unspeakable tumult of battle. And yet all this was an amusing confusion after all. You could sit immune in the thick of it. The smell of artillery came to you disguised as a faint, exotic perfume, possibly some sort of Spanish incense—perhaps even to be connected with the Catholic Church, so inextricably mingled with Señorita's poor little love tragedy. This domicile was bright, full of scent and colour, sizzling like a hot tamale. If Kenneth closed his eyes he could see Madrid—though he had never been in Madrid, and his conception was correspondingly extravagant.

It was all jumbled up with Moors and the mysterious Alhambra. But even when he opened his eyes it was with great difficulty he recognized any of the old landmarks.

And moving about in it now, so harmonious with its multiple inharmonies, he saw a little, shrunken lady, bony of form, sharp of shoulder, lavender of countenance. Powder stood forth brazenly, though it did not suffice to conceal those wrinkles which must—no one would care to count them, however—run well into the thousands. In her cheeks there were no longer any roses left. It would be easy to restore the roses. Señorita knew the properties of the rouge pot well. But she was not young any more, and all romance was fled; so why cling to roses? Now, with Mrs. Brathers it was another matter entirely. She quite leaned, though of course very delicately and discreetly, toward the rouge pot still. Yes, she had a kind of furtive hankering after it. But then, there were Voeufs and epochs left her, whereas the Señorita stood quite alone, uncherished, unsought. Her flaming Spanish beauty had faded rapidly, and she had slumped, growing old ere her time.

Something crashed next door. "Oh, *shoot!*" they heard the Voeuf exclaim. He had tipped his water pitcher off the stand. Señorita sprang back and crouched like a cat. But Kenneth could hardly keep his merriment within the prescribed bounds. Presently the lady recovered from her fright. And then Mr. Bromley was heard going out of his room and off to the *salle-à-manger*.

"Now we can speak," cried Kenneth, to whom this enforced silence had proved trying almost to the point of explosion.

"Yes," she agreed, also in English, "but not too loud. What is it, young man, that you have to say to me?" Curiously enough, their positions were exactly the reverse of what they had been upon the occasion of the first meeting at the *marché*, when the same question would have been quite legitimate upon his lips.

"I understand," Kenneth began, "that you are here on a secret mission."

But she interrupted him. "Stop! How dare you speak of that?"

"I wasn't sure but that I might be able to help. . . ."

"You!"

"Why not? You needn't mind that I'm legally chained to Mr. Bromley. I think *we* are linked, you and I. A kind of mournful sympathy links us."

"What! You know?"

He nodded vigorously.

"You know all about it?"

"Except that you might be able to supply me with certain details. . . ."

"Don't dare to speak like that!"

"All right. But I must congratulate you on the escape."

"Ah, I am coming to think of it as that way indeed!"

"Well, Bromley can only hold me in his clutches until I'm of age. Then, I too, shall be quite free—like you!"

"Yes, it is something to be free."

It was odd that freedom for them both—freedom from the Voeuf—should depend upon the action of courts and judges.

She sat down stiffly, yet remained in motion.

"From the day of our meeting at the flower market," said Kenneth simply, "I've counted myself your slave."

She smiled a little, perhaps especially since their conversation had turned so emphatically upon freedom.

"Many men have said that to me!"

"Yes, but no one of them was disinterested, I'll bet my hat. You see, I'm not in love with you. Honestly I'm not. I volunteer on general principles."

She sat looking queerly at him. Suddenly she jumped up and began nervously pacing about again. She crossed to the window, thrust back the curtains with their vermillion over-drape, and looked defiantly out at the winter fog.

"There is a man," she began at last,—"*somewhere in Par-reess. . . .* You are young and much about. If you can find him for me. . . ."

"We'll talk of rewards later," suggested Kenneth quite generously.

She jerked open a drawer and fumbled about, tossing outlandish articles of apparel this way and that, as though they formed a haystack and she were searching for the historic needle.

"But you don't hope to find him in there?" questioned Kenneth, whose eyes joyously caught the glint of several neat little daggers and a revolver or so, strewn at random, like plums in a pudding.

And she drew out, after all that frenzy of search, merely a little package from which she took a Spanish cigarette which went promptly between her teeth. Kenneth had hoped she might produce a stick of dynamite; but he was coming to understand that, with the *Sefiorita*, a murderous intensity must accompany her most innocuous actions.

"I cannot go longer without a smoke," she explained. And her visitor assured her that a mutual smoke would not be out of place, "since your former husband isn't here to stop me."

She experienced a mild thrill of revenge. It was no very great revenge, just assisting Kenneth to break one of the rules. Still, it was something. She extended the package toward him a trifle timidly.

"Once," she mused, "he would not let *me* smoke. "He told me the ladies of his countryee did not do that. He brought me instead his socks to darn. Bah! Now I would blow the smoke in his face!"

This militant sort of talk appealed very strongly to her new retainer as the two sat puffing. And the puffing brought out more confidences. After Bromley divorced her, she said, she tried to help her poor brother with his inventions. Her poor brother had invented quite a number of things, but his magnum opus was a very special and extraordinary device—no, Kenneth needn't ask what sort, since that was not the point now. All at once the poor brother died. And she was left with the invention unexploited on her hands. There came an American. She was now all alone. He came to her

with offers. He wanted to help her make a success of the invention. Very well, she said. So he became, as *Señorita* worded the communication, "what you call a partner in it." And she added:

"I made money—verree much, with the business of cards."

"What?" cried Kenneth, "you're in the card business? You mean fortune-telling?"

"Yes," she replied quietly. "I am a teller of fortunes. It is all I have left to do—except with the invention. But he stole it," she wailed, "and went away with it to Paris."

This smooth partner of hers, it seems, had given as his excuse for making off with the invention, the fact that there seemed no very brisk market for such matters in Spain. Away he went, and away with him went the invention, and she waited and waited in Madrid.

"But I was a fool!" she cried in conclusion. "He came not back to me! Months—three months it is, and he comes not back. I am a fool! He has duped me! I do not doubt he is become a millionaire by it."

"But you could find him." Kenneth did not understand. "You have his address. Letters must have been written."

Ah, *Señorita* lamented, she knew not any address. He had not written once. She rose and walked furiously about the room. "I will kill him when I find him!"

Then Kenneth asked who the man was. But she still did not choose to answer him directly. She cast a suddenly suspicious look his way, appearing all at once shaken in her resolve to make a confidant of him; but he met her look so frankly that her doubt gradually subsided. However, she felt it urgent there be some powerful bond between them.

"First you will swear to it," she whispered sharply.

"Swear to what, *Señorita*?"

"That you will not betray me or give up till we have found heem."

"I swear," said Kenneth solemnly—as a matter of fact, quite impressed for a moment.

"But you must swear on this," she said, whipping out a

lean little stiletto from the drawer whence had come her cigarettes. "It is a custom of our family in Spain. It goes back to the Inquisition."

"I see," he replied. "Well then, I swear again, Señorita." They laid their hands together on the hilt. There was hardly enough room for two hands, but by crowding and overlapping a little it was managed.

"And to tell no one *hees name*," she added while the oath was still in progress.

"But I don't know his name," objected Kenneth.

"You will know him," she said hoarsely. "You will somehow never fail to know him. He is tall, with wavy hair and eyes like a Spaneesh sky. Ah, he is a handsome scoundral. Yes, you would never take him for what he is. Such is the way of life," she added sadly.

"But," protested Kenneth, "I've just *got* to have more than this to go on. Why can't I know the fellow's name?"

She looked at her accomplice again narrowly. "It may be I am foolish to tell you so much. But so desperate am I grown it is no matter. A little more and I will end it all—all in the river—so! I am become what you call *reckless*. Yes I will tell you it all. You must look for him everywhere, in crowds—everywhere. His name—his name. . . ."

She came up close to him so that her breath, scented vaguely with turnip, was hot against his ear. And she whispered a name. It made him vibrate with excitement. He had never until now heard the name spoken. But he had seen it in print. Or rather, he had seen it engraved. He had, in fact, seen it on the other side of the card which contained the tiny progressive luncheon map.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MRS. BRATHERS DEFENDS A MASTER

ALBERT BROMLEY was a man of leisure, in the strictest and best sense of the often maligned word. He was doing nothing and he was doing it quite beautifully. Standing to his credit at home in the bank, and registered in safe, conservative stocks, was more than enough to see him through very comfortably indeed, even though, as he sometimes insisted, he lived to be a hundred. And since just in proportion to the number of years short of that mark he came would appear the magnificence of his monument in the little cemetery on the hill (which could never, he also insisted, do him the least bit of good) Mr. Bromley sincerely hoped to defeat the marble just as extensively as possibly.

When Mr. Bromley, following the dressing-table accident, stepped anxiously down out of his private corridor into the ill-lit dining room—anxious alike lest he be too late for his breakfast and lest the lady of his newly awakened amours might not be intending to put in an appearance—there he found her! Possibly she, on her own side, had been just a trifle anxious too. But this encouraging emotion, if it had a place actually in the lady's heart, was sedulously and with an almost maiden modesty concealed. Mrs. Brathers was vehemently engaged in a discussion with Miss Curtis over the importance of Leonardo da Vinci in Renaissance art, the same having sprung from a remark of Jacques' concerning the abduction of Mona Lisa from the Louvre. Jacques had just slipped in from a night's gaiety, and so felt considerably in need of coffee. Still, finding himself the sole Bernard representative at table, he realized that he ought to make some slight effort at conversation.

"Perhaps," suggested Miss Curtis, as the newcomer from the private corridor seated himself, "Mr. Bromley will come to our rescue."

"Yes," said Mrs. Brathers with some asperity, also a touch of rather impatient temper, "we will let Mr. Bromley, who is a *critic* of art, settle this point of difference."

"You flatter and disarm me," the pleased Voeuf assured her. "I can't quite pretend to be a *critic*, you know."

Bromley, as he confessed, was *not* quite a critic. Still, he had a very intelligent eye, as also a sense of matching, weighing, and general comparison stimulated by an inspection of positively every important public gallery in the world, to say nothing of a great many private ones.

"Well," explained Mrs. Brathers, as her admirer's chocolate and roll were brought in, "Miss Curtis has been maintaining that da Vinci is to be criticized for having executed portraits with minute fidelity, thereby anchoring them to an era, and cancelling the universality his work might enjoy if . . . if. . . ."

Her eloquence began doubling back upon itself. However, the adversary was ready to take up a dwindling theme.

"If, like many of the *greater* old masters, he had abandoned photography for the more enduring abstractions, which alone can be said to *live* in art expression."

"Such as the fancy of Raphael?" suggested Jacques.

With this innocent interpolation of his the eyes of the two young persons met. Their gaze even lingered a moment. Mr. Bromley, who was only interested in the conversation on the widow's account, noted this look. He mechanically set it down. Mrs. Brathers would certainly have noticed it also—she of *all* people!—had not the preservation of the Vinci status depended so vitally and absorbingly upon her.

"Why yes," replied the young art student meditatively, "or the beautiful disembodiment of some of Carlo Dolci's better work—his achievements in symbolism."

"Ugh! Carlo Dolci!" sneered the lady from Scranton.

"Or let's say Sassaferato," pursued the other quite unruffled, and with the defiance of a well-fortified personal valuation.

"Maudlin and wishy-washy! I cannot endure these painters and never could!"

Mr. Bromley looked anxiously from one disputant to the other. Much was at stake. Oh, a very great deal. He must champion the lady of his Epoch. His own convictions, so far as art was concerned, mattered nothing whatsoever on an occasion like this.

"Don't you think, Miss Curtis," he suggested, "that there's a certain distinction to be drawn between the collective art of the Renaissance and what you call the 'modern' school? I wonder if I make myself quite clear?"

"Yes," she replied, in truth a trifle confused at finding herself pitted directly against so learned a personage, "but it's undeniably true, isn't it? that the best tendencies throughout the Renaissance are those which are finding fruition to-day." And she added, a little daringly: "I wonder if I make *myself* quite clear?"

"But," the widow cut in, "what about the portraits, then, at the Luxembourg, and over in London?"

"Mrs. Brathers, you know I don't look upon mere portraiture as in any way permanent or vital art." But the eye of the artist from Chicago chanced to fall, just at that moment, on the portrait of Jacques done by an impecunious pensionnaire a long time ago, which hung in a proud place on the dining room wall. She felt suddenly just the least bit sentimental, and didn't press the point as she had certainly intended doing.

The original of the portrait rose at this stage of the discussion and announced with a sigh which terminated in a yawn that he must be off. Miss Curtis rose also and said she ought to be on her way to the atelier. If he liked, Monsieur Jacques might escort her as far as the corner.

"*Toujours ravi!*" declared the Frenchman with an undertone of ungraspable sarcasm.

At the door Miss Curtis turned to nod a preoccupied adieu to those who still remained at the table. Her woolen skirt swirled about her shoetops. Wool was perhaps, upon the whole, her favourite material. She had a distinct predilection for woolen skirts. They were always very severe and plain, and they always hung vaguely. There was something about Miss Curtis's woolen skirts which irresistibly suggested soggy weather. She generally wore a stiffish shirt waist with her woolen skirt, and the shirt waist seemed to delight in a very high and choky collar which tilted her head and gave commanding prominence to an already rather prominent chin.

"*Au revoir!*" snapped Mrs. Brathers. Red spots gleamed in her cheeks. When Jacques and Miss Curtis were gone, she continued speaking in the same tone. She told the Voeuf just what she thought of a deluded young thing who dared so flippantly to enter into discussions of weighty matters with those twice her age and many times her judgment. "Still, being so young and raw, I suppose her folly's simply to be ignored," she at length moderated. The heat of the encounter having relaxed, the widow's pulse, quickened in behalf of one of the coolest and most enigmatical of painters, dropped again to the normal Brathers beat. She drank the last of her chocolate.

"Don't you think," ventured the Voeuf, anxious to get the talk upon a more comfortable and sentimental basis, "that there might be a—a kind of interest springing up between those two?"

At first Mrs. Brathers mistook his meaning. "What!" she exclaimed, "between da Vinci and Sassaferato?"

"Oh, dear no! I mean between those two young persons, Miss Curtis and M. Jacques."

"Why, no," she replied, forgetting at once every particle of animosity. "Do you really think so?"

"I've suspected there might be."

"I confess I hadn't noticed. But then," she continued, by way of apology, "you see I've been here so short a time. And that girl always riles me so when she talks about art."

"Well, I suppose she must, as you say, be humoured on that score. Still, it's my private opinion she's in love with the young man."

"Oh, dear me! Only think of that!" She was more than willing to forgive and forget everything. "Indeed, I must keep my eyes open from this moment forward. Fancy a bit of romance right here in the house!" And then she added the inevitable phrase: "Right under our noses!"

"Yes," sighed the Voëuf. "Fancy!"

"What makes you sigh like that?"

"Did I sigh? I don't know." And he sighed again, more deeply than before.

Mrs. Brathers sighed also, and then they were silent for a moment.

And right on top of this almost thrilling silence, as though some sort of signal had sounded, the place was in a sudden uproar. Madame was heard approaching from a distant part of the house, where she had been lecturing her husband. The lecture had considerably overrun the accustomed hour for clearing the dining room, and Madame was enraged to sense afar off (it was almost uncanny!) that the servants had permitted the table to stand nearly a quarter of an hour longer than usual.

Instantly the place was in the throes of violent commotion. Frightened women in calico and aprons, frowsy and ill-shod, went helter-skelter about the room. It was like the confusion on a sinking liner. Mrs Brathers, who had consumed but half her little roll, was horrified to behold it swept off with the crumbs. Some one hastily spread down a covering of green felt, while another placed a vase of artificial hollyhocks in the centre of the table. Madame's sewing-basket was put down tenderly, while her own special upholstered easy chair was slid out on its casters from a seclusion behind the piano. Eléonore went through from the kitchen, a look of terrible dismay on her face. She carried a bucket which slopped over a little at each step.

In the thick of all this hubbub stood Mrs. Brathers. She

was dreadfully frightened, and placed one hand over her heart, a trifle too high up. Mr. Bromley, however, who was a much older resident, and was more or less accustomed to such occurrences, gently conducted her out of harm's way. He was obliged to lift his voice a little in order to make her hear him, though his lips were really quite close to her ear. Despite appearances, he assured her, there was nothing actually to fear. He would escort her. She might rely on him in this crisis. Softly his arm crept round her widow waist. That was the departing picture to which Madame was treated. It actually amounted to a counter shock. She left off screaming a full second, holding her breath.

No, Madame had to confess that she did not get the United States point of view at all.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

AN EPOCHAL TEA

THE man who had robbed the Señorita of her invention, then, was the very fellow who had bumped against Kenneth as they rode together in the 'bus along a sunny boulevard, and who had instructed him in the technique of Avoiding *nettoyage général*. The discovery of this most amazing coincidence sent a thrilly feeling like a kind of cerebral seltzer all along the roots of the young adventurer's hair. He felt half stunned with the deliciousness of the shock. Yes, he more than ever felt himself immersed in a vast sea of mystery.

They parted, he and Cassienda, wondrous good friends, having sworn an undying devotion to the cause. But he chose to keep all his cards unplayed for the present. This new twist added wonderfully to the zest of what was hourly becoming a more and more serious game. She thrust out her funny hard fingers when he left her; and, on an impulse, Kenneth carried the aging digits to his lips in a polite, brushing salute copied from one of the boulevard theatres. It greatly appealed to the distraught lady, and stirred memories, too, which seemed to bring a softer light for a moment into the fierce Latin optics.

Her new champion went off very high in resolve. He burst into the dining room, where peace was once more brooding, and Madame, as abruptly composed as she had been ruffled, sat quietly darning her husband's socks. A tiny half hour since, she had scourged her husband with almost the eloquence of a Racine. She had driven him forth from the house, minding not one bit his protruding eyes or the minor ominousness of his responses. Now she sat darning his socks.

"Monsieur?" she said pleasantly, peering over her golden pince-nez.

"Yes, Madame," Kenneth returned, pausing diplomatically, as though he recognized here a subtle obligation. Madame was a good friend, and, considering her powerful position in the house, a valuable one as well.

"Tell me, monsieur," she pursued, in the beautiful contralto which signified that her soul was full of a child-like trust and tranquility, "You find the 'toute petite' altogether comfortable?"

"But yes, Madame," he answered, crossing and leaning upon the closed keyboard of the ancient upright piano.

"It is small," Madame admitted. "But there is not a better view from any of the windows of the house."

"You have reason!" agreed Kenneth.

"You like looking out upon the world from a window, monsieur?" She had come upon this expression, or one very similar, in a recent book, and it supplied her in this instance with that faint spice of philosophy she loved to insert unobtrusively into a conversation. This habit of gently philosophizing was one which appeared to be taking an augmenting hold upon her as the years blanched the grey of her hair little by little. It contrasted strikingly with her moods of shrillness and furious household passion. And it deepened the aura of subtly august intellectuality which clung to her, and which she took every means of encouraging. Madame had friends who were poets, scientists, philosophers—even statesmen. She liked to think of herself as a person who, in the lamented *ancien régime*, would have exerted an influence. . . .

"Yes," Kenneth agreed, not knowing precisely how such a question ought to be answered, "though I think I'd rather be where the crowd is."

"Good," said she, just as Socrates might have said "True." But she mused: "When you're as old as Madame Bernard, you'll be glad enough to sit quietly by and let the great world roll where it will."

It was simply wonderful how suave and mellow Madame could make her voice when she was in this kind of mood. She possessed, indeed, a voice of the same remarkable, insinuating flexibility which Balzac attributes to the grandmother of Louise de Chaliou in her prime—"une voix de tête quand elle est forcée; une mélodieuse voix de poitrine dans le médium du tête-à-tête." With Madame Bernard it was the household voice which was apt to be "*forcée*." Yes the household voice was a voice of the head. But the voice of pleasant intercourse with friendly and unoffending persons, during hours of repose like the present, was the voice of the chest, or perhaps even of the stomach, full-bodied, rich, sonorous, and bland.

Madame sighed and began a fresh heel, which seemed to launch in her an equally fresh train of thought.

"I must ask you, monsieur," she said, "whether you have noticed what a friendship it is which has sprung up between Monsieur Bromley and Madame Brathers. They have not been together in the house a week, and you see for yourself how intimate they are grown."

"Parfaitement."

"You do not laugh at me, monsieur?"

"But, no. All the same, I wouldn't let such a little thing bother me."

"You call it a nothing, monsieur?"

"But yes, madame."

"A less than nothing for them to meet at dinner and sit up half the night together?"

"Evidemment!"

"You are accustomed to that in America, monsieur?"

"Mais, bien sûr!"

"Hélas!" she sighed. And for a moment the darning fell into her lap, while the lady gazed off into vague far-spreading space which might be supposed to reveal in a visionary way something of the puzzles and perversions of that great and little-comprehended America: that land full of dollars, which delivered up such odd, free people. Yes she gazed, for a

fleeting moment, with almost the same quickening of fancy as stirred poor old Mr. Willet to so lively a visioning of the Salwanner.

Over their cups of watery chocolate in the morning it had been agreed between Mrs. Brathers and Mr. Bromley that they should take tea together that afternoon in a certain very fashionable establishment over the river. It was a tea place in one of the special and recognized tea districts of the city—a district roughly bounded by the Avenue de l'Opéra, the Boulevard des Capucines, rue Royal, and rue de Rivoli. But it wasn't like so many of the tea places up in the Étoile district, patronized only by Americans. Indeed, it was a resort standing high with Parisians of the better sort, who could always be sure of finding it not oppressively overrun with tourists. Of course there was always a sprinkling of the alien population—but a nice, intelligent, exclusive sprinkling, merely adding to the general tone of the place what bay leaves are supposed to add to soup. And there was music—quite good music. In a word, it was a tea place both elegant and discriminating, without, at the same time, being in the least dull, and to which *jeunes filles* could be brought by the most scrupulous French mammas.

As they drew up to a dear little sparkling table, advantageously located in the very centre of the large room, both Mrs. Brathers and the Voeuf would certainly have been marked by any observing onlookers as persons in an extremely mellow condition of happiness.

"Ah!" sighed the Voeuf happily.

So did Mrs. Brathers.

Then Mr. Bromley rubbed his hands gently together, and looked very eagerly across at his companion, while she carefully tucked a veil, damp from distilled breath, up under the narrow rim of a hat she had purchased only the day before in the rue de la Paix.

The orchestra was playing selections from the score of one of the popular Viennese operettas of the moment.

"This is *delightful*!" she cried.

"Yes," he agreed, "it seems a good lively place. I'm glad we decided to come here."

She smiled, blushed a little for no particular reason, and began scanning the dainty menu card which enumerated all the nice things to be had for the mere asking.

Ah, it was a happy owl there, opposite this faintly blushing and wholly adorable lady; an owl a little anxious, of course, though in a pleasant way indeed as contrasted with the sort of anxiety the *Señorita*, for one, always inspired; an owl somehow not so very wise in the ways of women, yet dependent upon their favour and caprice for his very breath of life.

Yes, they were, the two of them, mildly tipsy, yet it was only lights, music, gaiety, people, each other—especially and consumingly each other—and the prospect of approaching tea, which made them so.

"Oh, may I have some of those *darling* little white cakes?" asked Mrs. Brathers, happening to glance up from the menu as a plate of sweets went swiftly by to a distant table.

"You may have anything in the city!" he replied with reckless romantic opulence. "Let's just see what they're called here." And he picked up another of the gilded cards and began studying it absorbedly, carrying it very close to his pale grey eyes.

"Have you forgotten your glasses?" she asked.

"Yes, by Jove, I have. I'm afraid I'm getting absent-minded!"

Mrs. Brathers, who already knew from experience how singularly prone he was to twist his little personal forgettings round so as to make them seem to depend upon amatory obsession, did not encourage the tendency now by any comment at all, though she secretly rejoiced in this tendency. He felt a vague disappointment. How delicious to be scolded by her! What a sense of possession it gave one—especially what a sense of being possessed! But this time he went without his scolding. Mrs. Brathers had her subtle coquetry. It was

quite second nature for her to see to it that a chase should be kept sufficiently exciting. She raised a lorgnette to her eyes—eyes after all only a little more positive of tint than his—and joined in the search.

Their waiter approached and insinuated his well-informed self into the tête-à-tête. He readily located the little white cakes, and even offered to speak English—a suggestion which met, however, with cold disdain. When he was gone, Mrs. Brathers, smarting under the rap of that offer, carried the scorn into her voice.

"How stupid it would be to have to have English spoken to you wherever you go, like the tourists!"

"Yes," agreed Mr. Bromley, "only fancy!" He denied her next statement containing the modest admission that "of course she didn't speak the very best French in the world," and then he went on to say that he hoped, wherever he might find himself, it would never be necessary for the natives to relinquish their own tongue to suit *his* convenience.

"Unless," she smiled whimsically, "it should happen perhaps to be one of those dreadful heathen South Sea Islands, or some place in the depths of Africa."

There was an implication, understood and subtly seconded by him, that naturally they wouldn't, either of them, ever find themselves subjected to such distressing and uncivilized ordeals. "In Greece," he expanded genially, "I quickly acquired enough Greek to carry me about—and I believe Greek is generally looked upon as a pretty difficult language."

"I suppose all their teaching it in the schools doesn't really help much." Mrs. Brathers wasn't strictly at home in this particular realm. She'd never been to Greece. In fact, as will perhaps be recalled, her clergyman had advised her not to go. She would be sure to grow interested in the sceptics. . . .

"No, it doesn't help a bit," replied the Voëuf. "As a matter of fact, I learned more Greek on the street cars of Athens than I ever learned in school. I suppose I have an ear."

(Yes, Bromley, you had an ear. You had, indeed, two

of them, two rather abnormally large ears, standing well out from the head, which were always propped wide open so that nothing, however trivial, might escape you!)

And he was just going on to say something more about the street cars of Athens when their waiter returned, and tea became, for the time, a very engrossing matter.

Now it must be recorded that Mrs. Brathers took her tea in an exceedingly weak state. Tea was one of her major failings. She was devoted to it. But her doctor forbade it on account of her nerves. Here, as so often, she compromised, agreeing to forego the pleasure of *strong* tea, but not the pleasure of tea *altogether*. Mrs. Brathers was delighted when her doctor solemnly assured her she must humour her nerves, and she countenanced with graceful resignation the pouring of quantities of hot water into each cup. Thus she compromised. And yet her fear of excess, in even the matter of so mild a stimulant, prompted not infrequent qualms of conscience. Without qualms Mrs. Brathers simply wouldn't be Mrs. Brathers. She was quite conscientious, too, about airing these tea-time scruples. It wouldn't do, she argued, flatly to refuse to drink tea when those with whom she mingled socially drank it, though this didn't mean that the qualms could never return to fill her soul with happy torment. Mrs. Brathers esteemed doing as the Romans almost a tenet of her religion. In fact, it *was* a tenet. It was a beatitude. It was the eleventh commandment.

The waiter who had not been suffered to speak English deftly arranged between them the delicacies they had chosen and retired to a respectful distance. Mrs. Brathers served the tea herself. She adored serving tea.

"Besides," observed the Voëuf, stirring his cup and forcing out lemon juice with the tip of his spoon, "your touch somehow gives it a flavour, you know. Ah, it really does! I've drunk tea, Mrs. Brathers"—and he went on to enumerate a few of the hundred odd corners of the earth where you would expect the tea to possess peculiarly delectable qualities—"but never such delicious tea as you've poured for me here in Paris!"

"Oh, you flattering, insincere man!" she laughed. But the seriousness with which he assured her that in this she was wrong, and that he really meant every word of it, all but brought tears to his pale eyes.

"Do you know," she mused, perhaps a little daringly, and after a short silence given up to an abstracted gaze across the animated room, "other men have said that too?"

And Lord, how sober our owl looked then! What droll concern chased away even the earnestness of a moment previous!

To her?

Why not?

Other men had told her the tea was rarest which was of her own pouring?

A faint blush was confirmation ample yet so delicate.

Alas, it made him feel he oughtn't to have spoken, then.

But why not, if he really felt that way about it?

Why? But wasn't there a difference? Mrs. Brathers must see the difference—if *other* men. . . .

Well, but for that matter. . . .

Yes?

Well—how just should she express herself? Why, he must see he was—was himself "different," which made a new *kind* of difference!

Though a little vague, this nevertheless seemed to ignite for them both a tiny flame of relief; a ray of hope brightened his skies—yes, undeniably. He glowed to it—strove to clear away all those clouds that obscured the full and radiant bath of light his soul desired.

"You do indeed think me different from all the others?"

"Why of course—utterly."

"Dear Mrs. Brathers," he faintly murmured, "unlike any man who has—who has ever come into your life?"

"You must let me pour you another cup of tea," she said very softly.

Quite captured was Mr. Bromley, and given over to his Epoch. He was a different being since Mrs. Brathers' arrival.

in Paris. For instance, he had been used to spend his evenings largely at a club in the American quarter; now he preferred taking Mrs. Brathers to the Comédie, or one of the good Boulevard theatres. Once upon a time he'd even been known (sly dog!) to frequent a little the Folies and the Moulin Rouge, where he would always be made much of by the wonderful ladies in the *promenoirs* who liked his quaint, stiff chivalry, and who strove to keep him talking, after he had imbibed a glass or two of very mild wine, until the most abandoned revelers had "deserted the colours of Bacchus." Ah, the gay—yes at times, the *frivolous*—Voeuf of those days preceding Mrs. Brathers' entry into the arena! He had even talked about the street cars of Athens at the Folies Bergère; but of course all that was out of the question now. He only went to teas, now, and fashionable soirées, where the subject of street cars might still be considered in vogue, to a certain extent, though it undeniably met with less sprightly reception.

"We ought really to come here often," said Mrs. Brathers, delightedly, as the last of the little cakes disappeared. "Paris is a big city, isn't it? I expect there are charming places almost without number which we never even hear of."

"It seems too bad," observed the Voeuf, "to be here and *not* hear of them." He looked indeed, quite earnest over it; but also a bit vague, as though somehow conscious that this sentiment might be given even so broad an interpretation as to stand for life itself and the untasted fruits thereof.

"Perhaps if one were to stay long enough," she mused, "and were to go about it, in a way, systematically . . ."

But then it seemed as though a shade of the same larger significance slipped into her mind also, and she sighed, both realizing how such an attitude would rob pleasures of their finer essence, and blushing a little to fancy the talk had entered a delicate if outwardly philosophic channel.

They shook themselves, in a highly refined and of course strictly figurative sense, and Mr. Bromley lighted a cigarette, which he obtained by calling "*Garçon, garçon!*" in a rather unnecessarily plangent voice.

"What is that they're playing?" she asked, humming along with the orchestra, her head swaying slightly in rhythm.

"I don't know," he answered, "but shan't I send word up to the leader and find out?"

"Oh no, you dear foolish man, for I don't care to know badly enough. Isn't it pretty though?" And she was humming again, humming so adorably that his heart ached with happiness.

Bromley liked being called dear and foolish. Ah, but this is really doing the matter but a poor half justice. He adored being called dear, even though she did say it with a kind of labeled lightness. As for being called foolish by her—well, that was palpably a case of a word's not carrying its strict meaning at all. Being called foolish by Mrs. Brathers had nothing whatever to do with being a donkey. . . .

"You're sure my smoking doesn't annoy you?" he asked.

"Oh, quite," she replied. Then a look of over-the-hills stole into her eyes. "In fact," she went on, her voice tuned low to a tone of sad sweetness, "I'm really very fond of it. You see, my husband. . . ."

She hesitated, and Mr. Bromley took it up. "Your husband—I've so often wondered about him." And then, as though feeling his words had too personal because too general a sound, he quickly added: "He smoked?"

She nodded. Her eyes grew a little moist, and when she spoke there was a kind of emotional hoarseness in her voice. "Cigars, for the most part. He was very particular about the quality."

"Yes, yes," soothed Mr. Bromley, deeply distressed at sight of her grief.

The subject of smoke had unexpectedly served to revive the late Timothy Brathers in all his glory. She went on about him at some length, speaking always with a sad earnestness; but the first quaver of sorrow gradually disappeared in a flood of zealous enthusiasm. "He was always so good to me,"

she concluded, with an effect of simplicity that really made it very touching.

"Yes, yes," Bromley said again—not that these words bore any special significance, but because he somehow *couldn't* be eloquent in this connection. Indeed, the frequency with which the deceased bobbed into their conversations was beginning to exert a really melancholy effect upon Mr. Bromley. If only, after all these years, and now that they had come together, she could be made to forget—a little. . . . But with the increase in their intimacy came also the drab, augmented emergings of the late Timothy Brathers. Mr. Bromley couldn't understand, he told himself, why this should be. Sometimes it even seemed to him that he wasn't getting a bit closer to the lady of his Epoch. Yes, sometimes it seemed to him exactly as though there were some sort of chasm between them. "Oh, dear," he would lament to himself, "for I *cannot* believe she's fickle. . . ."

But there came a sharp interruption just at this point.

"Oh, Mr. Bromley!" she cried. "Do look! No, don't turn round suddenly. Oh, this is terrible!"

"But dear Mrs. Brathers, what is it? I *must* look!"

"Oh," she simpered, "I'm afraid this is going to be somehow embarrassing!"

Mr. Bromley's colossal curiosity could brook no more. He turned abruptly right around and saw, at a table only about three removed from their own, Kenneth and Cassienda. They were having the finest sort of tea party, and the lady was brazenly smoking.

"Good God!" cried the Voef helplessly.

Mrs. Brathers lowered her veil.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE LAW IS LAID DOWN

YES, there they sat. You could not mistake them. And the story behind it all was this:

In the first place, Kenneth was in despair about the Señorita's robber. The immense excitement consequent upon his apprehension of the fact that this undoubted villain and his pleasant friend of the 'bus were one and the same mysterious person had, indeed, carried him a long way. At least it had seemed to. But when, leaving Madame Bernard gazing off into the Salwanner, he had rushed to trap his prey—or at least pry into the surprising combination—lo! it had developed that the little luncheon map was nowhere to be found. It had vanished into thin air. It was lost. And—on its opposite face were the name and address of Cassiendra's robber. He remembered the name well enough: Hugo Terrie Sterrett—rather a nice name, he thought; though some of the worst people in history have had some of the most enviable names. But the street and number had not registered. They might be in his subconscious, but what good did that do? Would they—*could* they be in the city directory? He searched and found that they were not. Had he by any chance a telephone? He had none. (This was not one of Sterrett's opulent years.) The little scribbled card was the only clue. And now it was lost. It was an exasperating thing to face, but it had to be faced. The card was the one clue, and the card had disappeared.

But it was still possible, he recollected, that the Señorita might be plumbed for facts which would lead to some other clue he had not reckoned upon. The chances were slim at best. But he must try. He approached the sad daughter of Madrid

and (especially having overheard certain breakfast-time plans which gave him an irresistible idea) jingled some coins in his pocket, crooked his arm invitingly, and said: "Come over into town and we'll have tea together."

She looked at him queerly, for a moment incredulously. "Me? But I have not taken tea with a gentleman since. . . ."

"Never mind that," quoth Kenneth brightly. Then, voicing a truant and not strikingly pertinent thought: "Didn't Mr. Bromley ever take you to tea?"

"Do not let us speak of heem!" she cried. "When I think of heem my blood boils!" The Señorita drove six or eight pins into her ornate and rather voluptuous chapeau. And then, of her own accord, she did go on speaking of him, after all. "At first," she admitted bitterly, "he took me everywhere. He was proud, then, of showing me off!"

She indulged in a final defiant primping before her glass, flashed a look all about her gipsy-like room—as though she had half a mind to snatch up a gay silk mantle or two off the trunks for further adornment—and announced she was ready to go.

Kenneth had been counting his exchequer quietly by the window, and reached the conclusion that it would be possible to afford the luxury of a taxi. Life held compensations.

"No man," said she with wistful happiness in her shrill foreign voice, "ever took me in a taxee before!"

They were off.

Directly they entered the tea place Kenneth (his eyes alert for this development) discovered afar his guardian and Mrs. Brathers, as we have already in leisure contemplated them, lingering over their confidential cups. He chivalrously drew out the Señorita's chair for her. It was a chair which adroitly brought her face to face with the other table.

And then Cassienda's youthful host outdid the most extravagant conceptions of niceness. The very Voeuf could hardly do more. He ordered an assortment of little cakes for her, and asked the waiter to bring in some good brandy, which they burned together on lumps of sugar, garnishing

the tea with the pleasantly stimulating syrup which remained when the flame was gone. The little Spanish lady very much approved this innovation. She sipped her tea and was grateful for the brandy. Her fierce little black eyes sparkled very gently now.

But Kenneth was ready for the change which transformed them directly their gaze fell upon the back of the man who had once left the Baptists for her sake. And then she looked beyond his back and perceived the visage of Timothy Brathers' widow. Mrs. Brathers happened to be simpering a little.

"The *beast!*" murmured the Spanish lady between her glistening teeth.

"What's the matter?" Kenneth wanted to know with a fine air of innocence.

"The matter!" she repeated, a little wildly.

"Well," he suggested, "I suppose there's nothing exactly against the law about it, is there? She's a widow. He's a widower. I should think it might be pretty lonely, being a widower."

"Then why did he deevorce me?"

This was baffling logic. There seemed no reasonable or wholly convincing answer. For if Mr. Bromley had continued with his Spanish wife, there would obviously be no need of all these epochs with their romantic fluxes and their monotonously disappointing conclusions. Yes, it was really a wonder Mr. Bromley hadn't thought of that himself.

"I don't mean to let this go on!" she continued.

"But what can we do about it, Señorita?"

"Oh, I will scrrrratch. . . . ! Or"—she hesitated, speaking all at once with subtle cunning—. . . "I will *tell* her. . . ."

"Tell her what?"

"I will tell her who I am!"

Kenneth giggled, much pleased with the success of his tea party.

"I can tell her some things of *heem!*"

Kenneth was sure she could.

"Oh, that I should meet him again," wailed the wretched Spanish widow, "—and like this, with another woman!"

Kenneth had an inspiration. "Why not show him how little you care?" And he passed her another cigarette.

"Yes!" she suddenly cried, catching his spirit. "Why not?"

And she told herself she didn't really care anyway. But it upset her. And because he had upset her, she swore to herself a terrible oath that he should certainly be made to pay. It was just then that Mrs. Brathers made her own upsetting discovery.

When Mr. Bromley turned around, Señorita Ferruco blew a defiant cloud of smoke right at him. She would show him how little she cared! Yes, she would blow her smoke in his face. And she would never speak to Mrs. Brathers again.

The occupants of the other table made their escape very shortly, retiring by a door which let them out into another street than that from which they had entered. Bromley was obliged to walk clear around the block to beckon their taxi.

Soon after ascending to his tower over the kitchen, Kenneth heard the tinkling bell. It tinkled the requisite number of times to signify that his presence was in demand below. At first, through a moment of brief, prayerful suspense, he decided it was going to be merely hot water. But a final blast sounded, sharper and more peremptory than any of the others. No wriggling out of it. He was summoned below to give an accounting.

Kenneth descended with considerable apprehension. He didn't know what might come of this. It was a scrape. Not, perhaps a scrape of the very worst sort; but still a scrape. He knocked politely on Mr. Bromley's door—a formality normally ignored.

Mr. Bromley looked at Kenneth in a severe yet puzzled manner. "What makes you carry on this way?" he asked.

"Sir?"

"Isn't the town big enough, I wonder?"

"But?—"

"I've been trying to put you on your honour, Kenneth, and this is how you repay me! I've given you a long tether, but I plainly see it will have to be shortened—perhaps very materially."

"I was hungry," Kenneth muttered. "I thought I'd like just one cup of tea." He spoke with consummate wistfulness.

"I don't want you going out with women," Bromley answered dryly.

"Oh, but the Señorita—"

"I know," the Voëuf broke in nervously. Then he came over and sat solemnly down on the edge of the bed. "Sh-h-h!" he cautioned. "She's in there."

Kenneth nodded obediently, and the other went on, speaking in a raucous whisper. "She's some one you've just barely met here in the house. I don't want you going about with— with strange women."

"Yes, but we're very good friends already. She's not a strange woman any more."

"It's amazing and rather disgusting, Kenneth, the way you have of making friends."

"But can I help it if people take to me?"

"Can you help it?" The Voëuf was repeating the words mechanically. His mind was suddenly seized with a new conjecture. "Tell me," he demanded hoarsely. "Did *she* invite *you*?"

"Sir?"

"I say, did *she* suggest your going to that tea place?"

The temptation was insistent, but he put it behind him. One must be loyal to one's accomplices when it was humanly possible. Especially when one's accomplice was a woman.

"Oh, no," he replied lightly. "I did all the inviting. It isn't any fun taking tea all alone. You know yourself how that is, sir."

"Oh, Lord! How you upset me!"

"I like the Señorita," Kenneth told him frankly. "She's ever so jolly. She reminds you of a top that never runs

down. But she seems to have taken a violent dislike to Mrs. Brathers."

"Sh! How do you know that?"

"You should have seen the daggers she looked!"

"Oh, this is a horrible mess!"

Kenneth couldn't see why.

"Nor need you!" the other snapped. "You have annoyed me very much, Kenneth."

"I'm sorry. But there isn't any place here in Paris to play football, and a fellow has to do something. If I didn't keep doing something I think I'd blow up. You've no idea how tremendously I feel like blowing up when I'm not doing anything! I look around for a little excitement, and I see a lonesome lady whose husband jilted her a great many years ago. I don't see any harm in just trying to jolly her up a little bit."

The Voef, who had appeared vaguely distressed when the boy said there wasn't any room in Paris to play football, started and caught his breath at what followed. And he exclaimed, almost forgetting to whisper: "She told you that?"

"Told me what?"

"What you said about her husband jilting her?"

"I judged so."

"At least she has partially kept her word, then," thought the deluded and disconcerted but withal faintly thankful Voef.

"Well," he continued aloud, "we needn't go on about this matter any longer. I must dress for dinner. You know how displeased I am."

"Yes, sir."

"That's sufficient. Please turn over a new leaf at once, or I shall be obliged to send you back to St. Dunstan's. I know you don't want to go back there."

The grim St. Dunstan's stood perpetual menace to Kenneth's peace of mind. That was the great drawback to Europe: the steamship service was altogether too efficient.

"I brought you over to Paris with me," continued Mr. Bromley, "because I wanted you to see a bit of the world."

And you must remember that I brought you against the advice of many of your father's closest friends. They said that Paris wasn't a fit place for anyone of your years, and I told them that with me you would be safe anywhere. But now just *see* how it's turning out! When you go on like this you make me wish I'd listened to their advice." He cleared his throat. "I pride myself on knowing how a boy ought to be brought up. What I want to do is to leave you on your honour. That's it, on your honour—if you'll only help me." Kenneth was paying the very best attention, and looked docility itself as he sat there soberly drinking in the other's none too fluent periods. Mr. Bromley spoke with starts and stops, and had an uneasy feeling that he was not really getting anywhere definitely at all. Still he pressed on. "My time is so taken up—with one thing and another—that I simply can't devote every single minute to keeping tab on you. It's seemed—er—it's seemed much the best plan to keep you on what we've agreed to call general instructions. But what good," he asked helplessly, "are instructions of any sort if you don't pay any attention to them?" Then he stiffened and looked almost overpoweringly severe. "Now listen to what I'm going to say. There are three special instructions I'm going to add to the list of general ones." He numbered them off solemnly on his fingers. "You are forbidden to neglect your studies. You are forbidden to smoke cigarettes. And you are *absolutely* forbidden to go out with women. I think I need hardly add that the last is the most special of all."

Mr. Bromley was not at first conscious that he had lumped women quite as egregiously as he lumped boys. He had used the term "women" just as he used the term "cigarettes." Mr. Bromley knew Paris, and he knew life. He hoped he had experienced enough by this time to give him the poise of genuine authority. He was, in his own way, quite as emancipated as Mrs. Brathers, and therefore fully entitled to lump whatever he chose. Nevertheless, in this instance, he followed up what he had said in a softer mood of qualification: "With

certain women it is all right for you to go out. I shouldn't mind your going out with Madame Bernard, or, I needn't, of course, add, Mrs. Brathers. But on the other hand, there are women I wouldn't have you go out with for the world."

"Nice women, like Mrs. Brathers. . . ."

The Voëuf smiled faintly and thought Kenneth, after all, a rather discerning youngster.

"Or," the boy continued, "with women who have a great deal of grey hair, like Madame?"

"Yes, you seem to have at least partly the idea. But—"

"Then I may tell you that I have a friend downstairs—"

"Not . . . ?"

"The singer—Mlle. Cyprienne. Yes."

"Good God, Kenneth, you haven't talked with *her*?"

"Why not? While everybody else was speculating and guessing about who she was, I spent a whole afternoon riding with her in the Champs Élysées. Of course I've talked with her. Why not?"

"Good God!" cried the terrified Voëuf again, striking one fist helplessly against the other.

Yes, Kenneth thought, it's always women who make him swear. And it seems curious, unless. . . . The conjecture sent a chill through him. Was it possible that once upon a time . . . ? He recalled what she had said about having once known a Mr. Bromley. But—and he laughed away his little fright—it was quite out of the question.

"Kenneth, Kenneth, why did I bring you to Paris?" wailed the distracted Voëuf.

"Because," the other very patiently explained, "you have theories. Everybody admires you ever so much for having theories. I'm sure I do. Ever and ever so much."

But Bromley wasn't to be soothed so easily. "It's just shameless of her, after. . . ."

"After *what*!"

"Sh!"

"Is she a friend of yours too?" asked Kenneth naïvely. And then Mr. Bromley appeared to come to with a start.

His face was very pale and scared. His eyes moved restlessly all about the room. "Kenneth," he said at length, in a truly cavernous voice, "You must swear to me that you will never see her again!"

The boy wondered, rather, whether his guardian had in mind making him take an oath with the same formality which Señorita Ferruco had required. It would be much less interesting, since it was certain Bromley hadn't any dagger. But Kenneth had no idea of swearing to any such oath, however administered. "We're friends," he objected guilelessly. "She's asked me to take tea with her some day. I keep asking you why *not*? And you keep refusing to *say* why not!"

"Will you promise me?"

"But I'm not blind. It would be pretty hard, wouldn't it, being right in the same house. You see how it would be. And I don't see why it should interfere with any of your theories, sir."

"Listen, then—I must tell you!"

Kenneth leaned forward, but was all the same prepared not to believe one word against his friend the singer downstairs.

The announcement, however, was disappointing. Bromley merely whispered tragically: "She isn't a woman—a woman I can allow you to be with!" But he had really said as much as this already. Bromley certainly seemed to be getting deep.

"You mean," Kenneth suggested, "she's—well, a woman of the world?"

The Voeuf suddenly had a mental picture of Kenneth looking everywhere in Paris for a vacant lot where he could kick a football with other boys. But he thrust the rather pathetic picture aside to welcome the phrase. He nodded his head, evidently somewhat relieved, though with the heavy air, also, of one who was not, after all, quite answering the question between them.

"But," said Kenneth stoutly, "even if she were ten thousand times worse, I'd be her friend just the same. Being friends," he explained, "is an awfully funny thing. Either you are or you aren't. Nothing else makes any difference."

"Oh, Lord!" cried Mr. Bromley, who began to admit that

there must be something wrong with his theories somewhere. And he added miserably: "If you only knew all . . ."

"But why don't you tell me, then? Is it one of your theories that people in real life ought to talk like Henry James?"

"I daren't. . . . Oh, I feel sure we ought to go away from rue Jacob!"

"All this is terribly complicated," sighed Kenneth. "But, honestly, you don't need to be concerned about me. Honestly you needn't. I guess I can take care of myself. I've been doing it enough years, haven't I? There isn't the least bit of danger. Honestly, there isn't. Besides," he added, leaping to embrace what looked to him like a most happy inspiration, "the singer has grey hair, you know—almost white in some places."

The unhappy gentleman sat ever so disconsolately on the edge of the bed, in the centre of great, perplexing Paris, his hands pressing between his knees; yes, even sat rocking a little with his problem. Kenneth looked at him attentively and as though he found him, at that moment, a really interesting object. "I'll try to be good," he muttered. "You know what a mess I usually make of it. But I'll try." He jumped off the bed, laid one hand a little irreverently on Mr. Bromley's shoulder, and held the other out. "I won't bother you any more—never!"

"Well, we'll see," said the Voeuf wretchedly. "I don't know what's going to come of all this." He looked at his watch and began laying out dinner clothes. "I must dress."

"Then everything's all fixed?" asked Kenneth sweetly.

"Yes—I don't know. We'll have to somehow feel our way. You *do* upset me so! I can only hope everything will come out for the best."

"So do I," replied the boy sympathetically "—whatever it is *you* hope." He began edging toward the door. "Shall I tell Eléonore as I go through the kitchen that you want some hot water?"

"Kenneth!"

"Sir?" he turned back, swinging on the handle of the door.

"I implore you, if you have any respect for my peace of mind, not to go to see the singer again."

But Kenneth made no answer—only continued to swing back and forth on the door.

"Oh, you're incorrigible! You certainly are! Now listen to me, Kenneth. Come in here again. No, come clear inside and close the door. Close it tight. *Don't* leave it ajar like that! Now please pay attention to what I'm going to say. You know the law puts you under my protection—protection and *direction*. Until you're of age the law absolutely requires that I act in the capacity of guardian."

"Yes, sir."

"Now, as your guardian, I feel . . . Kenneth!" He nearly danced with the delight of his inspiration. "Kenneth, do you care very much about smoking?"

"It's rather pleasant sometimes," the boy admitted, wondering what possible connection there could be here, and not caring to commit himself fully till he discovered the conceivable presence of a trap. "I've never quite learned how to inhale, you see," he added, for good measure.

"Well," continued Mr. Bromley in the same exultant tone, "if you'll promise me that you won't ever speak to the singer again, or go out with any other women, I—I don't mind if you smoke a very little—now and then."

Kenneth, as may be supposed, was too astonished at this flagrant attempt at bribery to make any immediate reply. He seemed to feel himself, for once, outdone in some manner.

"Of course," the Voeuf comforted himself, "it wouldn't be the same if you inhaled—anyhow it's emphatically the least of the evils I see all about you. And now—out, out!" he cried, waving his long arms desperately. "I'm dizzy! I feel faint! I must dress for dinner!"

And Kenneth sped off to his small strategic tower, pausing, however, in the pantry, to beg a plum tart of the cook and, in passing, to assure provincial Eléonore that her first American gentleman had, in his turn, just been raving about *her*.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE MIGHTY HUNTER AGAIN

THE following afternoon Kenneth opportunely met the singer just leaving for rehearsal. The meeting was opportune because he had just bought a handful of hardy jonquils at a stall in the Place Saint Sulpice, purposing to call and present them. It was, he realized, a very sentimental thing to do. But somehow, try as he might, a fellow could never steer altogether clear of sentiment.

She greeted him warmly, holding out to him the left hand which remained yet ungloved.

"I wish you would take these," he said, giving her the flowers. There was a pleasurable feeling in his throat, except that it was perhaps a little too stuffy.

"They're for me? Oh, how charming!"

He wished he had invested all his remaining cash.

"See here," she cried, "how beautifully they go with this muff!" She fastened them in place, while the rusty old driver craned round to watch the process.

"It really was dear of you to give me these," she said.

And Kenneth, for a wonder, couldn't think of anything further to say; and so, for a still greater wonder, said nothing at all. It certainly was a most uncommon situation!

"Monsieur," said she at length, drawing on the other glove, "you promised to come and see me. But I'm afraid you've forgotten."

"Oh no, indeed!" he returned quickly. "I haven't forgotten."

"You were to come to tea, weren't you?"

"And *gâteaux*," he reminded her, at which her laugh sounded in the quiet street.

THE MIGHTY HUNTER AGAIN 107

"Well, then," she pursued, "when is it to be?"

"Whenever you say," he replied, with an air of modesty and adoration combined. Were poor Bromley ever presented with such an attitude of affectionate docility he must surely expire right on the spot.

"To-day?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Good. For there's no work this evening. From four o'clock I'll be quite free."

"Then shall I come at four?"

She nodded and stepped into her carriage. Kenneth tucked the robe about her feet.

"I'll come at quarter to four, I think," he told her, with a rush of eagerness, "and wait if necessary. For you see our clocks might be slow."

She drove off, the beaver muff against her cheek, the bright flowers where their earthy fragrance could be most enjoyed.

Mlle. Cyprienne herself opened the door. She wore some of the yellow jonquils at the waistline of a gown with which they finely harmonized. It was a gown of very pale saffron silk under a delicate silver-grey net, and was illusively embellished with sapphire blue. The laws of repetition were faithfully and never obtrusively adhered to. On her left hand was a ring set with almost a constellation of tiny, keen blue stones. She wore very fashionable slippers.

The singer's tone, as she greeted him, was blithe and inviting; her whole bearing was so cordial it must have performed very easily the miracle of converting chapels into churches or poor men's cottages into princes' palaces. Not that her house wanted even so pleasant an apology, however. It was a house, as Kenneth speedily found, which reflected rather than encompassed its owner. Somehow it was not formed like ordinary houses, of arbitrary walls; its boundaries seemed rather to represent simply the natural border of a personal emanation. Therefore, having long ago accepted the

singer herself without any reserve, Kenneth was very soon registering the decision that whatever appertained to the singer must inevitably fall into the category of the accepted. It was an apartment covering an area about equal to that of Maison Bernard; but it was altogether different in its divisions; so that while one accustomed to the suite upstairs might here discover fundamental similarities, the diversion of noting more radical differences must necessarily engage first attention.

Kenneth was conducted at once into the ample music room, from one of whose windows the beam of the little candle had shone out. This large room, her favourite, combined lounge and workshop, dividing itself about equally between the two, though without the slightest suggestion of partition setting them one against the other. She would drop down to rest in what was her studio, and she would, quite as truly, put in long hours of work in what was her home. Thus she liked it to be: linking, as it were, achievement with all that was most personal, and recognizing her art as something not too high and mighty to have for setting the simple theatre of daily life. The rather austere aspect of a grand piano flanked by cases full of manuscript and published opera scores was smiled out of stiffness by informal luxury elsewhere, all about. The chairs were made for loafing. There were delightful shaded lamps and shelves full of books, where you could reach them with the least exertion. The room, in addition to its many charms of appointment, was of a noble height—this privilege accounting for the queer little flights one climbed to reach the salon and the corridor where Mr. Bromley and Cassiendra lived, up in Maison Bernard. It was plainly to be seen that the entire house had really been built about this room.

Yet Kenneth, his eye hastening on, was quick to perceive that the music room, for all its effect of magnitude, was no more than a kind of spacious alcove to what lay beyond. And what lay beyond was the most amazing thing about the whole house. For it was a pool. Not a very large one, perhaps, as pools go, but lined with cool green tiles, and sumptuously

edged with marble. And beyond the pool, at the far end opposite the music room, was a great open fireplace with logs crackling on its hearth. The marble pavement before the fire was thickly strewn with furs, many varieties of big game; and across this furry space the firelight flickered warmly before plunging down into the cold bosom of the pool. By submitting yourself to the salient influence of the place, the logs on the iron dogs easily became the embers of a camp fire. You were swiftly transported to hardier realms. It became, all about you, the very region of big game. On every hand the primordial would crowd in. Yet there remained always the ruddy touch of warmth and protection. In short, you felt yourself somehow in the very presence of the mighty hunter; and the breath of his free, roving life blew sturdy wonder across your horizon.

"Well," she said, brightly, as they strolled along one of the marble lanes skirting the pool, and approached some easy chairs which stood within the radius of the fire's pleasant prerogative, "you think my house an odd place, don't you?"

"I like it." His eyes were open very wide.

"Not strictly a Parisian house."

"Yet I should call it strictly *yours*."

"Thank you." And she added: "You're quite a man of the world, monsieur." Then, after a moment, she asked impulsively: "Tell me, does Mr. Bromley object to your coming down here?"

Taken by a surprise for which she was watching, Kenneth flushed, thus rather undermining the persuasion of the chivalrous lie which was quickly on his lips.

"I wasn't sure," she said.

"Why should he mind?"

Bromley himself had evaded that answer. Perhaps *she* would enlighten him! But she also hedged, though very gently.

"I didn't know. I thought he might, for one thing, feel we'd met in a rather unorthodox way."

"Yes, but he himself is always meeting women that way."

"Mr. Bromley?"

"Yes, indeed! He's really a devil with women. I've thought so many times since you spoke the other day he *must* be your Mr. Bromley, too, of years ago."

She laughed quite merrily, but it was partly, at least, to conceal a darker emotion. And as she looked at him her expression seemed an odd conflict between friendly interest and a consuming intensity. What was passing in her mind just then, no doubt vividly, was locked away. It is no light matter to speculate what a woman is thinking about. How more than delightful to have had Silas Lapham confront her as she sat thus in so complex a mood. It would perhaps wisely rebuke the very spirit of probing to behold that solid man of Boston effacing the whole question with a big, honest gesture, and expressing the opinion that human hearts are not to be read as you would read a newspaper. Cyprienne possessed, somehow, a knack of keeping primitive things out of her face and voice and manner—or at least of softening them into the familiar mask of enlightened social intercourse. She knew to a fineness how far she might expose herself without risk of being charged with an affliction of ego, just as she knew when a topic in ordinary drawing-room conversation ought to be changed. She carried the rule of comeliness to the last syllable of existence. Cyprienne was, in short, a very artistically civilized individual; yet one in whom even civilization had failed to destroy deep human feeling. Refinement seemed the essential fibre of her being, instead of that more paltry cloak possessed by the rank and file—a cloak useful and serviceable enough, but which can be flung to the winds, suiting exigency.

The subject of Mr. Bromley's possible objection to Kenneth's abrupt intimacy presented no more plausible avenues for expansion at present.

"I wish you'd tell me," she began, opening up a fresh field, "something about your life." Kenneth smiled, and she smiled also, hesitating: "I know, it sounds terribly general and a little hackneyed. But I've such a great fancy to .

THE MIGHTY HUNTER AGAIN 111

know what stages of growth have gone to make up—well, what you are now, your attitude toward life—people. . . .”

He tossed it lightly off. “I’d be sure to shock you. I’ve lived a very wicked life.”

“No, no,” she smiled. “I can’t believe that.”

“Why, *are* there ways of telling?” he asked innocently.

“Are there ways of telling? What do you mean, Kenneth?”

“Ways of telling by looking at anybody, I mean. Ways of telling right off by looking at a fellow’s face?” For Mrs. Brathers had been vaguely hinting at something of the sort, with discreet side-glances at Señorita.

But Cyprienne was not to be caught. “No,” she replied quietly, “I don’t believe there are—not always. But you forget I’ve done more than just look at you.”

“Oh,” he shrugged, “we’ve talked together a few times. But you don’t know anything about my wickedness. I haven’t told you.”

“No,” she agreed, “you haven’t told me. Suppose, now, you were to?”

“The risk would be too great.”

“The risk?”

“I shouldn’t be asked to tea again.”

“Whatever you’ve done in this terribly wicked life of yours, we’ll have you to tea in spite of it.”

“But it would take too long!” he persisted.

“I’ll give you ten minutes,” she specified, referring with a little laugh to her watch.

“Of course I can’t think of anything offhand,” he argued.

“Exactly!”

But this was a challenge which promptly loosed his tongue.

“You think I’m an angel? Oh, no! I’m quite the reverse. I get every one all stirred up, wherever I go. There’s no living with me. Anybody will tell you that. I’ve made no end of trouble. I can’t help it. I’m a regular hoodoo. Don’t you call that wicked? Of course so far I haven’t murdered anybody, and I haven’t stolen anything not edible, and I haven’t wrecked a train yet or blown up an office

building. But there are things the law doesn't seem to cover. That's me!" he most inelegantly concluded.

"We must make new laws to get you punished, monsieur."

"I've been expelled from every school I've ever been sent to. The teachers all say I antagonize them. That's the very word they use. It's a kind of code word. But it isn't very pleasant to be told that—can't you imagine? Then there's a conference, and I'm expelled. Or else put on probation, which amounts to the same thing. Nobody cares but Mr. Bromley, and he doesn't really and truly care. He only frets!" Kenneth paused to smile a little over his own rather happy distinction. "But I don't mind all this, you know. It's part of my life. What can you expect? I want to go on learning and learning about things. Once I ran away from school and joined a circus—a very good circus, too. It was wonderful! I picked up more in a week than I'd learned in my whole life. I suppose," he expanded, "I'd be with the circus yet if Mr. Bromley hadn't put detectives on my track." He sighed.

Cyprienne smiled, and she spoke very softly. "So worldly, yet such a child!"

"I know," he replied carelessly. "That's what Mrs. Brathers says. That's what they all say. But it means ever so little to me what people say. If I chose I could say quite as much back." He looked shrewdly into the fire, clasped one knee, and laughed.

"Now I wonder—what would you say back to me if I told you your wickedness was only naughtiness?"

"I would thank any beautiful woman for noticing a mere naughty child at all!"

"Ah, you would only be proving the other side."

"What side?"

"I mean the worldliness."

"But there's nothing else to do in Paris." (In great Paris, he seemed implying, where there are no vacant lots with boys playing football.) "Besides," he continued, "we can never repay all we owe to women—to beautiful women."

THE MIGHTY HUNTER AGAIN 113

It was a very delightful sentiment, which he had picked up somewhere along the way—in a novel, perhaps, or at the play. He was much too busy to bother about sources.

"Monsieur," she said, bending earnestly toward him, "what do you know about women?"

"Everything and nothing," he replied, with the quaint little-boy air which made his sophisticated words somehow so unforgettable. "I've just kept my eyes open, and of course I've talked with ever so many."

"Have you known many women?"

"Oh, yes. Ever so many." He leaned back and half settled, with the ridiculous ease of one who will now choose, quite at random, from an inexhaustible store. "One of my dearest friends was a chorus lady. They expelled me because of her. And for doing—what do you think? Actually nothing more than I'm doing right this minute! I was at a school in Cambridge, and all I did was to go in and take tea with her at the Copley-Plaza. I don't know how it got out, but it did. The teachers were always snooping. They asked me who she was, and I told them she was a friend of mine. A relative? No, a *friend*! I told them I thought every one knew I didn't have any relatives. They shook their heads and wrote about it to Mr. Bromley. He wrote back that he had never heard of her and that he was both pained and shocked. If you knew *my* Mr. Bromley you'd certainly have to smile at his being pained and shocked over any one's having tea with a lady! They put it up to me. They said that if I would promise never to see her again, they'd let me stay on probation. I told them their old school was the dullest place I'd ever been in. If you want the exact language, and won't take away my tea, I said it was a hell of a school. It really was. I was already kept in from all field athletics because of demerits. Imagine! It was only the excitement of getting into town once in a while that kept a fellow from simply passing out. And I told them that the next time my friend came to Boston I meant to see her again, and have

tea with her again, if she would let me. You see, I had a kind of standing invitation. But then Mr. Bromley had me on his hands, and next time he put me in a military school in the Middle West. That was over a year ago, and I've never seen her since."

"This—this artiste, Kenneth—was she a good woman?"

"Oh, she was a very good woman."

"How do you know that?"

"Oh, I just somehow knew." He had grown suddenly a little shy.

"And if you'd found, when you came to know her better, that she wasn't a good woman, after all. . . ."

He was silent.

"What would you have done then?"

"If she were my friend it wouldn't have made any difference, of course."

His manner was still shy. Somehow talking this way with the singer wasn't quite like talking this way with anyone else—with Mrs. Brathers, for example! The best thing, he thought, was to get off the subject before she asked any questions about the Folies Bergère, or anything like *that*. "May I please come here and swim sometimes?" he asked gaily.

She smiled and glanced off over the pool. "You may come and swim as often as you like."

"Thanks. I'd like to ever so well."

Both were silent for a little time. Kenneth's cup was refilled, and he sipped happily. His eye explored the interesting place. He had never seen anything even remotely resembling it. Spread beneath the singer's favourite window was the skin of a great and strikingly marked tiger. She must have stood on the tiger when she placed the memorable candle in the window.

"What a beauty!" he observed.

Cyprienne, faithful to her philosophy of proportion in all things, cast away, with a brief sigh, the attitude of questioning, and smiled pleasantly as she recounted the history of

THE MIGHTY HUNTER AGAIN 115

this particular beast, as well as the histories of a dozen ambient monarchs. Then, a little more soberly, though quite as simply, she spoke of the hunter who had laid all these monarchs low. But she turned away, when the tale was done, and stood looking out into the dull garden. A mood of almost tearful abstraction hedged her in closer and closer, fenced her away from the very concrete mood of her tea guest. Presently she left the window and rested both hands on the boy's shoulders. He noticed again that vague, soft perfume, the same perfume that had clung to the note.

"It's a beautiful thing," Cyprienne told him, "to understand and to be understood." She looked straight into his eyes. "When we're young we build up our whole lives on the rare dreams of our youth. That was the way with me. I was young. The world was so fair and friendly. A lover came. It was all a part of the dream. We were married when I was only seventeen."

"Just two years older than I am now!"

"Yes, just two years older. Only a woman is always much older. It was a wild thing—a run-away match. We had barely met. And after that. . . ."

She was trembling a little, and she dropped her hands from the boy's shoulders, and her head drooped.

"After that?" he prompted, in his softest tone of worldliness.

"After that—years passed. And we grew up. And then, slowly, we came to see that it was all a mistake."

"Your being married?"

"Yes." She sighed deeply.

"And then?"

"And then, one day. . . ."

He thrilled and leapt to an almost dazzling conclusion. "The mighty hunter?"

"Yes," she murmured.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

SLAPS AND COUNTERSLAPS

DINNER that night in Maison Bernard proved, on the whole, a rather embarrassing affair. Monsieur and Madame had indulged in an untimely quarrel, begun just prior to dinner, and, since they hadn't succeeded in getting even approximately quarreled out, many a bitter and staccato phrase was snapped across the table, sometimes, however, cloaked in vinegar smiles for the sake of the pensionnaires. Monsieur Bernard, it is true, consoled himself after his fashion with an immersion in potatoes done his favourite way. And Madame also consoled herself as best she could in *her* fashion, which was to surround her plate with nervous little bullets of bread, rolled and compressed between her fingers till they took on much the colour and even something of the solidity of genuine projectiles. Madame often rolled bullets at the table, even when she wasn't angry; though the indulgence at such times always smacked of preparation in peace for possible future emergencies.

The infectious irony of the house placed Cassiendra right between her former husband and the lady of his newest Epoch. She sat there between them to-night in a state of the most frigid silence, throwing out keen little spiteful glances to either side from time to time. And as best they could, or to the extent they dared, the two outer layers of this queer sandwich talked back and forth, now behind the enormous ribbon bow perked so defiantly in the Señorita's hair, now, with greater temerity, directly across her lavender nose.

Yes, it was a pretty involved tableful. Kenneth alone appeared entirely unhampered, and chatted along as fast as he could, chiefly of pleasant nothings.

When coffee was, as usual, going around in the salon, the

contagious effect of restriction eased a little. Monsieur went directly off to his cheerful hole of a room between closets housing soiled clothes and mops respectively, and then Madame, with her accustomed versatility, soon grew serene and even philosophic, stretched upon her chaise longue. Señorita stood stiffly before the vacant fireplace smoking cigarettes with Jacques, who sat on the arm of a settee joking—rather sourly, it is true, for he had failed to negotiate an expected raise at the office; but still joking. The Voeuf and Mrs. Brathers, being relieved of the elbow discomfiture, chatted pleasantly and flowingly in a corner. Their background was a Chinese cabinet containing what few relics of former Bernard greatness remained. Kenneth, after quite seriously advising Miss Curtis (who was all in the dumps over the way her canvas was going) to try painting solid pastoral scenes for a change, and receiving the most haughty scorn in response, retired giggling to his fluff rug with the orange lining to begin plotting how he should escape for the evening and what he should demand of great Paris in the way of entertainment.

Before long, as it developed, Kenneth was called away from the fluff rug by Mr. Bromley, who told him that poor Mrs. Brathers had a very severe headache, and that he, Bromley, was going to step out after some bromo-seltzer. Kenneth couldn't believe his ears on hearing this. What did it mean? Why wasn't *he* dispatched for the bromo-seltzer? And he was hardly less surprised when his guardian informed him that he was to entertain Mrs. Brathers during his absence, and that he was to be very nice to her, so that she might forget, so far as possible, her poor, aching head. Yes, it was certainly a mystery. Life seemed just full of mysteries these days.

However, when presently, the Voeuf having taken his departure, Mrs. Brathers unobtrusively drifted into English, speaking ever so softly and confidingly, Kenneth began to see daylight. Oh, it was very subtle, but he began to glimpse the sly presence of a trap!

"I see so very little of you, my dear boy," she began cordially—not at all in the manner of one who has a bad head-

ache. "Why don't you ever join Mr. Bromley and me in our little excursions?"

Kenneth wanted to reply, with perhaps pardonable bluntness, that he guessed if he ever did he'd have his head neatly taken off afterward. But he decided it would be best, "under the circumstances," as Mrs. Brathers would say, to be a bit politic just now. "I should like ever so well to," he replied humbly, "only I've always felt I'd be in the way, Mrs. Brathers."

"How very absurd of you, my dear boy. I'm sure it would be a great pleasure for us both."

"Thanks. I'd awfully much like to."

"You know, Kenneth—I may call you Kenneth?"

"Yes, indeed, Mrs. Brathers."

"It's so formal to say Mr. Bayard, don't you think so?"

"I should say it is!"

"And it makes you seem so much older than you really are."

"I suppose so, Mrs. Brathers."

"You know, I look upon you as no more than a child, Kenneth."

"Yet I'm wearing long trousers already," he suggested.

"I know," she said, "but a little boy still, for all that."

"Yes, Mrs. Brathers?"

"And sometimes wilful—you really are, you know?"

"How am I?"

"Well, I don't think you use the very best sort of judgment always."

"I suppose the judgment of little boys wouldn't as a rule be very highly developed, would it, Mrs. Brathers?"

"Oh, now you are unkind and sarcastic. And I shan't go on to say any of the nice, pleasant things I had intended saying to you. No, I shan't."

"I'm ever so sorry," coaxed Kenneth. "Please, I'd like you to go on and tell me the nice, pleasant things. If you only knew how seldom any one says nice, pleasant things to me!"

She looked at him as narrowly as was temperamentally possible with her. "Sometimes I wonder if you don't laugh behind my back. . . ."

"I'd call *that* unkind and sarcastic."

"Well, we won't quarrel, *will we?*" She laughed nervously and brushed aside the vexing doubt of a possible insincerity on his part. "Now, my dear boy, I'm going to say something to you that I've really wanted to say ever since I came here to live in this house. You know, Kenneth, from the very first I took a great interest in you. Oh, yes. I thought you very interesting and bright. Mr. Bromley told me about how you are all alone in the world." She spoke as she would to a little child—as though she were recounting a very wonderful fairy story. "*No father and no mother. . . .*"

"Oh, did he tell you about the wreck?"

She looked rather startled, but seemed to collect herself quickly into an embarrassed self-consciousness; then went on, speaking very rapidly, with, in fact, a kind of vehement gush. "*No father and no mother, no brothers or sisters. And I made up my mind I would ask you to let me be your friend!*"

"Oh, but we were friends already, when we met," he interrupted.

"I don't believe I quite understand, Kenneth dear."

"I saw you getting out of your carriage at the gate, and Mr. Bromley counted your bags, and I heard you sigh out in the hall, as though you'd been through simply no end of troubles. I don't need more than that to sign people up in my social register."

"But what an odd notion," she said, puzzling over that queer register of his into which one's name could slip so easily.

"I've always been that way," he replied simply.

"Well, at any rate. . . . But you say he counted my bags?"

"Who, Mr. Bromley?"

"Yes, Mr. Bromley."

"Oh, yes. He counted them all. There were fourteen." She flushed slightly, and looked just a trifle displeased.

"I don't believe I quite understand. . . ."

"Oh, you musn't mind that. He counts things because he's so business-like. I suppose you would hardly believe it, but Mr. Bromley was a lawyer once. Lawyers, you see, have to make the most of details."

"Yes, I knew that Mr. Bromley was once a lawyer."

"Oh, he told you?"

"He mentioned it."

"Well, it's nothing really against him, you know. And anyway, that was a very long time ago, Mrs. Brathers. And it may have included the trunks—not just the bags. I don't entirely remember. Then he said. . . . But I guess perhaps I'd better not mention that, after all"

Mrs. Brathers wasn't a bit curious. "Oh, *do* tell me what he said then, Kenneth dear!"

"You really want to know?"

"Do tell me *quickly*!"

"Well, he said: 'What a lot of baggage women do require.' And that was all there was about it, you see."

"He said that?"

"Oh, something *like* that. It wasn't of any importance."

She cleared her throat. "He didn't say anything further, Kenneth?"

"Not a single thing. After that he seemed quite excited. He listened at a crack till you were clear inside your room. No, he didn't say anything more—nothing I can remember."

"What, he listened at a crack?"

"Yes, Mrs. Brathers. You see the door was ajar. He held it that way with his foot."

"But why should he want to listen, Kenneth?"

"I suppose he wanted to hear you coming into the hall. He often listens like that. You see, he was once a lawyer, and you never quite forget."

Mrs. Brathers cleared her throat again. "You're *sure*," she said, "that Mr. Bromley didn't say anything more, after I came in?"

"Oh, quite sure, Mrs. Brathers. But you were saying something about being my friend."

Realizing with a little start how far she had swayed from her topic, and into what a dangerous if intoxicating meadow she had wandered to browse, Mrs. Brathers flushed and said:

"Oh, yes—so I was, wasn't I, Kenneth? My dear boy, I wish you would let me be . . . how ought I to put it, I wonder? I wish you would let me be a sort of vice-mother to you!"

"To keep me out of vice?" he asked sweetly.

"Of course not, you silly boy!" she replied, giving his knee a shoving pat.

"Not having any family at all, I naturally don't care much what I do!"

"Kenneth! I am shocked to hear you speak so!" (She really was.) "You know you have Mr. Bromley, and I'm sure he couldn't be any more concerned about your welfare if you were his very own. And now—now you have me, too. And I *do* so want you to look upon me as a mother. I know you're not in danger of getting into any real vice. How absurd! Still, you are a youth in Paris. . . ."

"A child," he corrected.

She smiled. "I know how I would treat you if you were my son."

"How, Mrs. Brathers?"

"Well, I would have a frank, straightforward little talk with you. I would point out to you the dangers that lie in a young man's path, and I would help you to avoid them."

"I see you have theories too."

"Theories?"

"Yes, that's what Mr Bromley has. Every one thinks his theories are wonderful."

"Well," she hedged, "I don't know that you could call mine exactly theories, though perhaps they are, after all. At any rate, there are the definite dangers. . . ."

"Such as going out with women?"

She blushed again, and her eyes gazed shyly at the broad respectable wedding ring on her hand. "You musn't speak so loud, dear," she cautioned. But it was clear he had hit the nail very squarely. "Are you sure the *Señorita* doesn't

“speak English?” And, without really pausing at all, speaking with growing confidence, she proceeded: “Yes—that is one of the evils I should certainly feel it my duty to speak about. You know it’s—it’s a very dangerous thing, Kenneth.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“It might lead to—to very deplorable consequences.”

“Unless they’re all right, of course.”

“But we’re not speaking, now, of the women who wouldn’t lead young men astray for *worlds*.”

“No,” he agreed, “we’re speaking only of the other sort.”

“Sh-h-h!” Mrs. Brathers cautioned instinctively. “Are we *sure* the Señorita can’t understand what we’re saying? I suppose it’s all right. Still, it does seem a shocking and almost indelicate thing to speak such sentiments right out loud in a drawing-room.”

“But you don’t mean to apply such terms to the Señorita?”

Mrs. Brathers looked down again at her virtuous band of gold. “I cannot tell,” she said slowly. “In such matters as this, one must be guided mainly by one’s intuition. Now take that singer downstairs, whom none of us knows, of course. I’ve heard nothing—nothing actually incriminating, I mean—about the singer. Still, I’ve passed her a number of times in the court, and once over in town. Without any closer acquaintance than that, Kenneth, I can assure you there isn’t any doubt about her being a wilfully wicked woman.”

“You mean, of course, that she lives with men?”

Mrs. Brathers caught her breath violently. “How *dare* you say such a thing in my presence, sir?”

“But I thought that was what people always meant by saying a woman was wicked.” He was really largely naïve about it, in a sense. If people meant certain things, what on earth was the use of not saying them in the plainest words? But he had given the lady a terrible shock this time.

“What would Mr. Bromley say if he heard about your speaking so? However, we won’t discuss it further,” she concluded, with real firmness. “As I was saying, or as I was about to say, men are very poor judges in these matters.

They simply aren't any judges at all. You might go about with a very im—with a very improper woman indeed, Kenneth, and think her perfectly respectable—at first. But she couldn't deceive another woman. We always can tell. There are ways. . . ." And once more she looked down at her own smug wedding symbol.

It was, of course, long ere this, perfectly evident that Mr. Bromley had taken the widow entirely into his confidence about Kenneth. He had poured out his secret trials, his secret fears. He hoped her sweeter and subtler influence might succeed where his must somehow surely fail. Still, even all this didn't yet explain the *peculiar* horror with which he looked upon the friendship, so entirely charming, which had sprung up between Kenneth and Mlle. Cyprienne. Mr. Bromley must know the most shocking things imaginable about her. Kenneth tossed his head. Let them know what they chose to know, and pursue their intuition to the ends of the earth, if it gave them any satisfaction. For his part, he adored the singer downstairs. And nothing Mr. Bromley could say, and nothing Mrs. Brathers could say against her, would make the slightest difference. On the other hand, of course there wasn't any mystery at all about Mr. Bromley's not wanting Kenneth to have anything to do with the woman who had once been his wife. This constituted, as anybody must see, a dangerous alliance. Yes, the Señorita was plainly and quite understandably a wolf in the fold. If Mrs. Brathers should ever learn how cherished that same wolf was once! How the wolf was made love to in the amorous Spanish moonlight! How the wolf was assured, in soft, romantic terms, that Rossetti ought to have painted her picture!

"I don't think it's exactly a good thing, dear Kenneth, for you to be going around with *either* of these women."

"You mean the singer and. . . ."

"Yes, and the Señorita. Oh, you're *sure* she can't understand what we're saying? I shouldn't want, you know, for the world, to do anything to hurt the poor creature's feelings. But you see, I've read her like a book, Kenneth. I don't

know anything about her life, but it's in her face, dear Kenneth. *In her face,*" she whispered tensely.

But the lady's discourse was here cut short by a queer screech and confused scramble of stiff Spanish silk against various pieces of furniture which stood in the way as she came on. The Señorita, all this while, had been standing very erect before the empty fireplace. Naturally she had heard every word Mrs. Brathers had said. What a terrible trap for dear, trusting Mrs. Brathers to be lured into! How doubly dreadful, since the trap had been innocently planned just for Kenneth. In a flash, trembling with passion, the Señorita stood between Kenneth and the widow of Scranton.

"So, it is *so*, is it? That I am a wanton, is it? You would tell him that, is it? You dare, because you think I do not understand your *language*! Then I will pay you back, so—and so, and so!" And she actually slapped the astonished and terrified Mrs. Brathers across the face, thrice. "Now, I think you will be more careful in the *future*, is it not? The next time, I will do worrrse than this!"

She flew off and down the steps to the salon door. The knob turned in her hand, and she confronted the returning Mr. Bromley on the threshold. She screamed at him. "Will you let me pass?"

He did. Mr. Bromley held a small blue bottle in his hand. So great was his fright that he dropped the bottle.

However, there was no need of the bromo-seltzer. For Mrs. Brathers had fainted away.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE EPOCHAL HIGH WATER MARK

WHILE Mr. Bromley was restoring the widow to consciousness with the aid of smelling salts supplied by Madame, Kenneth hurried off after Cassienda, pursuing her to her room, and sliding through before she had time to slam the door. He was naturally very anxious to prevent her thinking him on the side of Mrs. Brathers. It was all a good deal like a schoolyard game. You had to specify very carefully which side you were on. You had to proclaim it to the world.

The Señorita was largely inarticulate. She alternated an hysterical sort of spasm upon the complaining bed with a fierce tenseness before mirror or blank window. Luckily, she hadn't misunderstood the situation. She even went so far as to credit Kenneth with an out-and-out abetting of her cause. Hadn't he deftly led the widow on to proclaim herself? No, he was perfectly safe on *this* score. As for the Señorita, however, her spat with Mrs. Brathers kept her awake the greater part of the night.

Back in the salon, meanwhile, Madame was talking French at a terrific rate. Such a thing as this had never happened in her house before. It was a disgrace. If the town should hear of it she could never hope to enroll another pensionnaire so long as she lived. What had occurred was shocking. Yet it was also complex. Policy didn't permit her taking sides altogether with the widow whose physiognomy had been assaulted, because the assaulting widow paid her quite as much a month. Financially and, therefore, ethically speaking, the two stood about equal before Madame's throne of justice. While of course she eloquently deplored the on-

slaught, she also laid great stress upon the forbidden use of English in her house—even if spoken very softly in a corner.

It was an understood rule that nothing but French should be spoken in Maison Bernard. There was a point of delicacy involved, which alien tongues could hardly dispute. When there was a confusion of languages, trouble was sure to follow. Madame said she would have to *insist* upon an exclusive use of French in the future. As a matter of fact, Mr. Bromley and Mrs. Brathers had been the first to introduce English into the Bernard salon. Madame would speak to Señorita Ferruco, of course. Madame could do no more than that, nor should she be expected to do more.

The Voeuf flamed with righteous wrath. "She ought to be turned straight out of the house!"

Mrs. Brathers was by this time restored, and little by little both he and Madame were acquainted with the particulars.

"I was just talking quietly here with Kenneth," she sobbed, "when the creature flew at me."

"Talking in English," Madame expanded.

"Why, yes, we were. But very softly, and then—we didn't know the Señorita could understand."

"Oh, heavens!" wailed the Voeuf. "This is the most awful calamity that could have befallen me!"

Madame was relentless. "So you *were* speaking of her?"

"Why, no—not—not entirely. Oh, dear! I believe I'm going to faint again!"

"Let me help you to your room," murmured Mr. Bromley in the forbidden tongue, his voice quite hoarse with concern and unhappiness.

And so he helped her to her room, and again Madame was treated to the interesting spectacle of Bromley's arm encircling her waist. Mrs. Brathers leaned on him a little. Madame's lip curled, and she turned to Jacques when the protecting door swung to.

"I think Madame Brathers is a woman of very little stamina," she said.

"Zut! She pays you three hundred a month."

"But need we carry these matters into our private life, my Jacques? Are we called upon to barter our very souls just to keep our bodies fed? At any rate, once the salon is free to them, we are *en famille*, and can, thank God, attain what valuations we please!"

"Yes," Jacques admitted rather gloomily. "Yes, here we are, *en famille*. 'Of the best,' he sighed, 'yet without any money.'"

"Still," observed Madame, with brows raised in an arch of slight complacence, "I flatter myself I'm able to keep starvation at bay."

"Yes, my mother—but at what a price! We must have the house running over with foreign ladies and gentlemen who slap each other and faint away in the drawing-room!"

"Oh, come, Jacques, thou art out of sorts. I think them really quite diverting."

She did not realize—neither realized—how completely they had exchanged points of view since the little conversation began. He had led off with "Zut!" and she was ending with "Come, Jacques!"

"Yes," he agreed sarcastically. "Oh, yes, I suppose they are. Indeed, the diversion they afford is sometimes quite exquisite!"

He got up slowly, stretching in a bored way. "It's a pity my esteemed father couldn't have held on to what little fortune there was in the family."

"Oh, there thou art right, my friend. But I've told him so till his ears are grown calloused to the sound of the words."

"Alas, the poor unhappy!" Jacques spoke with a deliberate sneer.

But his mother replied with much greater candour. "I'm sorry to say, my Jacques, that thy devoted father is a fool!"

Undramatic as it may appear, and anti-climactic—perhaps even deeply disappointing to some—no very serious issue resulted from the unfortunate salon episode. To be entirely

candid the injured party (no, we mean the widow who was slapped) could hardly, in conscience, press action against the offender, because, since it developed that Cassiendra had perfectly understood every word Mrs. Brathers had spoken, no one could reasonably blame her for feeling at least a little bit put out. Far inside her most secret heart—that very innermost heart of hers which perhaps not even the clergy could hope to explore—Mrs. Brathers was just a trifle ashamed. Yes, she admitted, now the heat of the fray was over, she had been a little too ready and anxious to shield a motherless boy from the dangers of Paris. Therefore, although of course externally she carried herself toward the Spanish widow with a show of frozen and deeply insulted hauteur, the Brathers conscience was, on the whole, pretty badly smitten.

This complication in the case, happily for others, prevented the placing of violent blame anywhere at all. Strange as it may seem, she failed to look upon Kenneth as really involved in the matter. She looked upon him—and the whole affair was somewhat hazy now with the horror of its climax and the subsequent fainting away—as sharing her belief that the fiery little Señorita couldn't understand what they were saying. Kenneth escaped without a single bruise; but retaliation for the three slaps was, in a mild manner, directed against the poor, scared Voeuf, whose instigation had been, in the first place, after all, responsible. This much she could definitely get hold of. He had worked on her sympathy, she argued, placing himself, indeed, with the heavy responsibility of his charge under the law, in a truly pitiable light. He really needed a woman. He had told Mrs. Brathers that, just as he had long ago hinted his need of a woman in a broader and more enduring sense. So now Mrs. Brathers, in her hyper-feminine way, turned mostly upon Bromley, as being instrumental in bringing upon her all this pain and shame and disgrace—as also this flutter of remorse which unhappily forced her in private to take just a little of the blame on her own frail shoulders. Such part of the brunt as she felt incapable of bearing, that Bromley bore—just as Bromley, seemingly picked out by the gods, disastrously pointed at by some divine

finger, bore the brunt of most things with which his destiny got mixed.

Nothing, however, for some little time, was to pass between the two widows, who utterly ignored each other, and whose places at the table were delicately shifted.

The feelings of Mr. Bromley it is very easy to conceive. That he, who would make the most romantic of sacrifices, who would cheerfully and proudly exert himself to the utmost limits in affording this timid and flower-like soul a masculine shelter—that *he* should be held responsible, in any degree whatsoever, came to him as an almost crushing blow. Had Mrs. Brathers turned on him in a splendid blaze of wrath, thereafter spurning all advances and stonily refusing to recognize even the melting repentance of a bended knee, then it is highly probable the wretched gentleman would have made away with himself altogether. Come river! Or come friendly flask of poison! It may be whispered that Mr. Bromley had, ere this, at crucial points in previous epochs, debated desperate remedies. Yet it had never quite come to that. Men like the Voëuf are, after all, seldom brought to the extreme pass. Come river, come poison. Still, if there be a loophole, by all means let us dodge the issue. Life is somehow sweet, for all life's cruelty. But she didn't turn upon him with any blaze of wrath. No, the widow's retaliation took the form rather of but a wan and watery-eyed rebuke.

Of course he promptly suggested ever so many ways out. He suggested, for one thing, as a possible solution, that they leave the house together: he, Mrs. Brathers, and Kenneth. But Mrs. Brathers compressed her lips quite firmly. She had settled for the winter, she said. She would not move. No, she wouldn't! She wouldn't give *anyone* the satisfaction of making her move—certainly not that creature! She would be wiser in the future—never fear! Oh, no—she was not angry. But she was deeply, deeply hurt.

So the whole upshot was merely a passing coolness in the widow's attitude towards her devoted and now so enormously solemn owl.

Mrs. Brathers having a day or so previous expressed the

desire of attending a special *conférence* on *The Evolution of the Doll* at the tiny Théâtre Michel, Mr. Bromley had promptly purchased tickets. The combat, with its attendant developments, had intervened. The situation was annoying, to say the least. It threatened to put an untimely end to Mr. Bromley's punishment. For Mrs. Brathers had to admit that since they had the tickets it would be foolish and extravagant not to use them. "However," she added, "it doesn't mean that I've altogether forgiven you, because I *haven't*." The misery of the Voëuf was thus rendered only a shade less abject.

She treated him, indeed, quite dreadfully until the *conférence* was over, and they sat opposite, with teacups between them. The *conférence*, fortunately, had proved a delight, and under the softly intellectual influence she beamed in quite her old sweet manner. She let go of the haughtier altitude and slid down cosily into her cherished lily pond. She sighed with the contentment of one home again from a tedious trip upon the stern high seas. Her cheerfulness revived. She forgot all the obligations adhering to the salon mixup. She was like a nation released from a horrid state of war. Hail, dear era of peace, with its unrestricted abandonment to art, literature, science, travel, love! We behold Mrs. Brathers quite herself again. And through this happy restoration, Mr. Bromley experienced the delicious thrill of a tacit reinstatement. She smiled on him again, and blushed as of yore when he paid her pleasant compliments.

Oh, how the chilled heart warmed within him! How blithely he washed his hands in the air above the table, while the tea steamed up, and all was serene and intimate once more. His heart sang. Listen, and you may catch its echo even now, like the lingering murmur of the sea in shells. The first cup—where could it have gone? He had absolutely no memory of drinking it at all! Joy deluged him and he swam. Let the cups flow on forever! Were they still in Paris? Ah, 'twas liker Paradise!

And Mrs. Brathers—one must spend a thought on her

sensations also. She blushed and gossiped and poured much hot water into her cup, experiencing, even at that, the twinges of conscience which were so much a part of her life. It was her Epoch as well as Mr. Bromley's. This was what one called being discreetly pursued. Yes, let the cups continue, so long as there remained plenty of hot water at hand with which to ease the imagined rebukes of her doctor. She would not quite say let them *flow on*, for that was too openly bacchanalian for the Scranton moral sense. Still, she was glad to have them continue. Yes, in a slightly more moderate degree, perhaps it *was* Paradise rather than Paris. One might call it that if one chose. After all, what one merely *called* a place wasn't strictly a moral issue—was it? Another cup? well, just one more. For lo! we have come to the bottom of our modifying pitcher.

The tea was rare and the lights were soft, and there was comfortable English humming all about them. And in the midst of it all he proposed marriage to the widow of Timothy Brathers. And with her gentle and lingering refusal the comfort of that comparatively simple comradeship of theirs merged into something far more complex. Association from this time forward was to hold its exquisite pleasures for them both, but it was to leave them, upon the whole, a little less at their ease than before.

However, this was all a part of the general scheme of inevitableness, which, to a degree, they recognized. No man may propose marriage and remain exactly the same afterward, any more than may the recipient of his vow, whether her response be a yea or a nay.

CHAPTER TWENTY

A PLOT UNPLEASING TO THE LATIN TEMPERAMENT

KENNETH wakes out of deep, dreamless slumber. He wakes quickly, springing up. No loitering. This is Paris! Besides, he has located the missing link.

How good it is to open your eyes and have the morning rush into them! Especially when the very first thing your blinking eyes encounter is a tiny patch of white cardboard just peeping from under the rug, way round behind the chiffonier!

Up in the lofty "toute petite," blithe gurgles sounded from the splashing washbowl. It is enough to make one shout for joy to find all the qualities of a "best seller" merged right into one's own personal life. Those generally exotic unities—so amazingly illusive in the realm of everyday affairs—were becoming, for Kenneth, almost as common as pepper and salt. It must be his luck, he told himself, to have it so. Certainly it was a glorious arrangement! To dominate from one's small strategic tower a field slight of compass but closely packed with action! This was like Troy's tiny stronghold, with armies of mere handfuls—and yet what empyreans of glory! Here was almost an epic, in the true classic sense!

He hugged himself. His growing excitement, as events became so rapidly pointed and pressing, matched the vast unusualness of things. But what made him so utterly wild this morning was the fact that at last he had the clue to Señorita's invention robber. The long-lost luncheon map was found!

Now, Kenneth had a plan. It came to him as he was plunging down the stairs to breakfast. Part of it was still pretty vague, but the beginning couldn't be clearer. His titular devil

counselled him. He would never think of proceeding contrary to such strikingly metaphysical advice.

At first, of course, he had been all for rushing right off to confront the robber in his stronghold in the rue Racine. But almost at once the larger plan had developed. It was deep and far-reaching, and it involved a number of inmates in Maison Bernard. To do the simple and obvious thing—that is, just hand the little luncheon map with its all-important address over to Cassienda herself—yes, it had, indeed, occurred to him. But such a proceeding as that would seem deliberately flouting all the delightful offers of high adventure which seemed inherent in the situation following this new development. A fellow who couldn't make the most of every situation didn't deserve to have any situations.

"The whole success of your secret mission," he told Cassienda as the two met, by appointment, in the tumultuous Gare Montparnasse, "depends on what you do in this crisis."

She nervously informed him that she didn't understand what he meant, and that she hadn't heard there was any crisis.

"Well, listen," said he, cheerfully, "and I'll tell you all I know about it. Perhaps you won't call it a crisis. But I've found your invention robber."

"What?" she cried, gripping his arm, just as she gripped it the day they first met at the *marché*.

"Yes, I have. I found him under the rug. Here, Señorita"—he linked arms with her, insinuating the direction—"a seat withdrawn from the multitude."

They sat down. All about them the world roared and rocked. Cassienda spoke to the shrill accompaniment of whistles and megaphones. She had to focus her voice to compete with an ambient babble of high-tension quality. Curiously enough, it wasn't the least bit necessary that they should have met in such a place as this. They weren't departing on any train. But Kenneth, with the titular devil at his elbow, had called her up on the telephone and asked her to be there at exactly a quarter to three. He had imagined how it would be. He thought the warlike conflict of whistles and whirring

r's, the tense pitting of Spanish s's against efficient French steam would be very delightful. It was all part of the plan which had developed on the way down to breakfast.

But she was on her feet again in an instant, and Kenneth, laying a hand on her sleeve, found her trembling. Somehow this brought a most unexpected pressure in his throat. He laughed it off, but he spoke to her more gently for a time.

"We mustn't attract attention, Señorita. We must keep our minds fixed on the fact that this is a very secret and diplomatic business. Come on, sit down here in this out-of-the-way corner, and we'll discuss what's to be done."

She sat down, but her trembling continued. Her eagerness shook the dreadful overloaded hat till it seemed as though the ornaments were in real danger of flying off. But appearing a moment later all at once to recollect that her bag contained a subtle panacea, she thrust it open and drew forth a partially consumed white turnip. This she began gnawing with her shiny white teeth; snipping bites, her teeth just shaving rather than ever quite plunging into the devoted vegetable.

Her accomplice chose to be very guarded in his disclosures. He evaded, for instance, any mention of such salient details as street and number. It was part of the plan to keep her temporarily out of things herself. But Cassiendra very quickly caught this intended denial, and, in her fiery way, combatted it. She *would* see him! she cried. This was a villain fit for the prison! "A life sentence he will get!" But she contradicted herself the very next moment, declaring that the law would be much too lenient, and that it must be she herself, after all, who should inflict the punishment. Kenneth assured her that, when the time came, they would sharpen the dagger together. But in the meanwhile, the plan must not be interfered with.

Then Cassiendra began talking rather wildly about the will—her poor brother's will, which had nothing to bestow *but* the invention. As a matter of fact, she had the will with her in her bag. She got it out and flourished it in the air. And it was this very emblem of law and order which gave Kenneth

the cue he had been somewhat perplexedly groping for. He asked her whether she didn't think the delicacy of her position called for the impressive offices of a lawyer.

No, no! she cried, a little frightened at such a suggestion. What she meant to do—and he must credit her with having a plan as well as he—was just quietly and unobtrusively to do away altogether with this thief of inventions! She didn't ask anything more than that. She would never ask anything more. At the same time, nothing short of that would ever satisfy her outraged soul.

But Kenneth stuck to his point. He wouldn't give in. He had a kind of vague notion that actually killing people carried one gloomily beyond the broad spirit of fun which so appealed to him. "You'll cook your goose, if you go trying anything like that!"

Her tongue skipped with fury. "Do not talk to me of a goose!"

"All the same, you'll cook it, good and brown, too, if you're not careful."

After a great deal of argument she finally reached the point where she no longer violently exploded at the mere mention of a lawyer. The progress was slow. Still, it was progress. At four o'clock she had got so far as to tell her young friend that he talked very high and mighty about a lawyer, but where was there one? And that, of course, was his big chance. Now he was getting at the real heart of his plan.

"You seem to forget, Señorita, there's one right in our house!"

"A lawyer?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Who?"

"Why, Mr. Bromley, of course!"

And then the action lagged again, while she became inarticulate with rage. Gradually out of the conflagration bloomed the old familiar assurance that he had spoken a name which she refused to hear.

At a quarter to five the action had so far revived that

Señorita was not only discovered listening to the name, but deciding its owner should be allowed to come to her rescue. She did not, naturally, view the rescue from the same standpoint as did Kenneth. In the boy's mind that very same genius of comedy which had effected his transfer to the *toute petite*, leaving poor Bromley squarely next door to his own widow—the same genius absolutely insisted upon Bromley's being the one who should plunge in and rescue Señorita now. With another widow standing on the bank hysterically applauding an act whose motive she was so very far from fathoming, Kenneth didn't see how any one could possibly ask for a more delicious triangle.

But of course he kept all such royal visions to himself. "From a legal standpoint," he was telling her at five o'clock, "I should think your robber could be caught without much trouble. He'd be caught right with the goods, and that, I should think, would make a pretty clear case. But now just imagine if you went to him all alone, yourself! He'd bluff some way, and put you off. Or he might do away with you entirely. And the next day both he and the invention would be vanished; and it wouldn't be at all easy to bump up against him again and get him to draw another map. I'm sure he's not a novice at this sort of game."

Cassienda was by this time quite calm. She had even, by around five-thirty, relinquished the intensity with which she had all along been gripping the inoffensive white turnip. "We do not speak," she said humbly, "but I will let him handle the business. You will tell him so."

And then Kenneth's eyes danced wickedly. They were coming now to another very vital point in the plan. "But you see," he said quietly, "it might be necessary to bring a little bit of persuasion to bear. . . ."

She exploded again. What? Was she to understand that Mr. Bromley hadn't *offered*? Well, no. That is, not exactly. Kenneth hadn't, as a matter of fact, quite mentioned the matter to him yet. How could he? Didn't she see, he couldn't until he'd conferred with *her*. And then Cassienda, as the

hands of the big clock moved slowly on toward six, made a very long speech, which was all swallowed up in a cloud-burst of surrounding noise. It seemed as though all Paris were vociferating in the noisy *gare*. It was almost like election night. Then a man in uniform came out and began calling out the stations between Paris and the border. The substance of her speech was missed. The conclusion, however, bore some reference or other to the Catholeec Church.

"Exactly," replied Kenneth, as the megaphone at length attained the border and disappeared into one of the ticket-selling compartments. They must put their heads together and devise some way to bring Bromley around. Cassienda cried, still militantly, that he was the man who had rrrruined her life; and Kenneth tempted her with the reflection that "therefore we will make him pay for it!" This was music. Cassienda had never been a member of the Other Cheek Club—at least not a member in good standing. Yet at six-fifteen Kenneth was still hammering away on the important doubt of Mr. Bromley's seeing things in the light they did.

"Of course," he suggested, "we always have your hold on him to fall back upon." This was to be the motive which the other widow, applauding on the bank, would know nothing whatever about.

"Yes, I will tell hees dove! So all this prrrrettee love game will be spoilt!"

He admired her spirit immensely, but deprecated her sense of the diplomatic. Such a programme as that might be very satisfying, in itself; but it could hardly help permanently destroying any hope of enlisting the Voeuf's professional services. And, besides, the day's true climax was at hand.

"Of course we can't help knowing the—ahem!—the tenderness of his sentiments toward Mrs. Brathers."

"Cat! I will scrratch . . . !" she was only half articulate.

But there was no scratching in his plan—at least no major scratching. He patiently, as the clock proclaimed half past six, explained to her again why she simply *mustn't* do that if she hoped ever to get the invention back. And he insinuated

that, instead, she must present to the other widow a front of the most irreproachable affection! All this was part of the plan which had developed on the little twisting stairs that morning, as he plunged down three steps at a time.

"You must go," he hesitated, "—go and—honestly, Señorita, don't hit me for saying it, because I can explain—you must go to her and—"

"Spoil that hateful face?"

"No, you must kiss it!"

"Do you say such a thing to *me*?"

"Yes, Señorita. Let me tell you why."

"Oh! Kees that face that I hate?"

"Well," he relented, "perhaps not actually kiss it. I wouldn't go so far as to say you'd really have to do that. It would amount to the same thing if you just made things right with her. You—I guess you'll somehow have to say you're sorry, Señorita!"

"Ah! Sorry!"

"But you don't have to be, of course. All you have to do is tell her you are. I wouldn't be, really, not in a thousand years. But she's so sentimental—you'll have her all in tears. She'll fall on your neck—you'll see. Maybe she'll kiss *you*. But you mustn't appear to mind. Just keep saying to yourself that we'll have no trouble at all winning Mr. Bromley over to our side if Mrs. Brathers comes over first. She'll be ready to call you her dearest friend on earth inside of five minutes. You see!"

Cassienda threw the word witheringly back at him through her teeth. But he defended it. "Friends are awfully valuable, Señorita. You just can't have too many! And now, if we don't jump onto the first 'bus that comes along, we're going to be late for dinner. Aren't you starving?"

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE CHARMED CIRCLE

FRIENDS! Yes, he had used the word with a fine flourish for the Señorita's edification. And, indeed, having friends and making constantly new ones had ever been a sincere passion with Kenneth. But how could he square all this with what he had done?

Friends! Yes, it sounded very fine. But wasn't this very robber of the Señorita's a friend of his? Wasn't he even an older friend than Cassienda herself? They had met on the 'bus and he had not even seen Cassienda until he reached the *marché* and was strolling about while Mrs. Brathers bargained. Yet here he had gone and pledged himself. Of course he had taken the oath before he had any idea in the world that the robber was going to turn out to be a friend. Once he had been sworn in, it was too late to turn back. But weren't there definite obligations on the other side?

Who was this fellow who had caused all the row? Perhaps a genius. Surely a fellow with at least tolerable resources and imagination, about whom he knew absolutely nothing except what he had been able to pick up as they jolted side by side over the cobblestones of the Boulevard Saint Germain. What if the fellow had a very decent sort of case, after all? What if he were no common scoundrel, but a veritable colossus of crime? What if he weren't even any real villain at all, but a fellow like Kenneth himself, with a fierce mania for seeing things happen?

Well, an oath was an oath, and he couldn't go back on what he and Cassienda had sworn on the handle of the dagger. But there were no two ways about it: he must go over to the camp of the enemy and at least call. Why had he waited a day, an hour? Why wait now, even a minute?

He drew the well-thumbed card out of his pocket and considered it carefully. Hugo Terrie Sterrett—no not the traditional name for a villain. Still, of course, you never could tell. He turned the card over. The friendly pencilled map, rubbed all faint and indistinct now, but still as friendly as ever, administered a tiny stab. Selling friends behind their backs like this had never been his method. It went against his special cult of ethics. It was necessary to his destiny, he knew, that there be victims, ever victims. Mr. Bromley, for instance, was a recognized victim. But that was different. Mere victims, in that sense, had a kind of fighting chance. Well, he had been dazzled by the rich invitation right under his nose. Now he was on the track of bigger game!

Down the stairs Kenneth raced and out of the house. When he reached the gate he perceived that the singer had emerged only a little ahead of him, and was just driving off. She was about halfway down the block. He sped after her and sprang upon one of the steps of the carriage, laughing a gay greeting.

"*Mon Dieu!*" she cried. "You need only a mask and a pistol!"

He merely laughed, and she went on: "Since you appear to be traveling my way, monsieur, won't you come in? You look the very personification of impermanence out there."

"If you don't mind," he told her, "I'm just a little too much in a hurry."

"Still, one covers ground, you know, even in here; though I suppose there is more time lost in alighting. Yet this is the first occasion," she added, "on which you've spurned the polar bear!"

He laughed again and refused to leave the step. "There's bigger game, after all," he observed, reverting to a phrase of his own thinking a few minutes since, "than even polar bears."

She laughed too. It was all rather ridiculous. Then she added more gravely: "what is it you're up to now, you wild boy?"

"I wonder if I ought to tell you?"

"Is it so wild as all that?"

"No," he admitted, "not so very wild. I'm going to call on the Señorita's robber."

She looked her amazement, and the tone of gravity deepened in her voice. "You mustn't be reckless. That is," she quickly qualified, remembering his proneness to hoot, "not *too* reckless." And then, as an ominous afterthought: "You know, he might have a gun about him!"

"But," sighed Kenneth, "I'm very much afraid he isn't going to turn out to be that kind of a robber at all."

"No? Why do you feel that?"

"Well—his name, for one thing, is somehow against it."

"Oh?"

"And then, you see, I've already met him. I don't remember all the details of him, but enough, I'm afraid, to feel that *everything's* against his turning out like that."

"You've met him? But this is immensely exciting! How did it come about? And when?"

"Why, you see—." And he told her the story of the bus. "Here," he concluded. "I'll show you the very map. See?" He laid the card in her lap and traced its fuzzy blurred lines with his finger. There was something vigorous and essentially masculine about the little map. Even in their present state of fuzziness and decay the lines knew exactly where they were going. The goal might be whimsical, but there was no faltering on the way. "You start there—" And he described the odd excursion step by step. He recommended the excursion to her. She would really enjoy it, he was sure. Especially the coffee at the end out on the Boulevard.

Cyprienne sat dreaming. There was a faint detachment in her look. She fingered the card absently—ran her fingers all along its edges—was only half conscious of the eager tale.

Kenneth thrust the card back into the pocket of his *pèlerine* gaily.

"And where," she asked him, still detached a little, "does this robber of yours and the Señorita's hold forth? Mightn't I, perhaps, take you all the way there? I'm just driving."

He paused a moment to reflect. Then he told her: "Yes, if you will, please, though it isn't so very far. I'm sworn not to tell anyone in all the world his name. But the Señorita forgot to include his address in the oath. You see at the time there *wasn't* any address. Shall I tell François?"

She laughed. "Yes."

"Rue Racine, François"—and he mentioned the number.

And then Kenneth, feeling under something of an obligation, abandoned his perch on the carriage step and slipped inside under the polar bear rug. She snuggled one arm lightly through his, in the affectionate manner which had developed with their friendship.

"Yes," mused Cyprienne, as though pursuing a theme which had been in her thoughts, "there seem to be lines crossing and crossing, like a curious, deft little plan. Now who would have thought"—and she smiled vaguely—"when you sat beside him in the 'bus that day...."

She trailed into silence, but Kenneth finished the phrase: "...that he would turn out to be the very one himself. I know. It is strange, isn't it? But quite jolly, don't you think so?"

"Yes," murmured Cyprienne.

"In fact," he continued brightly, "that's the best part of the whole business. There I sat, rubbing right up against him!" And then he added: "I always like to think the people I rub up against might turn out to be regular villains."

"What a life it is!" she cried softly, her eyes still dreaming. "Until this year I've never believed in these queer coincidences. But I'm coming to look at *everything* quite differently. Strange and wonderful things *do* happen. The strangest and most wonderful things anyone could imagine. It really gives one a new outlook on life. It's a sort of happy symbol—almost like finding a way to the end of the rainbow! You come, after all, to understand how it is that children believe in fairies. It somehow makes you believe in them again yourself. Do you know," she went on, speaking rather more darkly, "I'd come almost to think there was nothing mir-

aculous left in the world. But I'm beginning to see it's all such a wonderful little plan. Lines crossing and crossing, and our destinies to make up the pattern. . . . A charmed circle!" Kenneth recognized this as one of the singer's philosophic moments. He thought of Madame and her philosophy about looking out on life through a window. Curious, the fascination these obscure ideas had for some people!

"I suppose," she continued, "one loses sight of the magic and the charm very often because one's too close. Plodding along, right down in the midst of it all, we're apt, alas, to lose vision. You go on and on, day after day—Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday—like that. You get discouraged and keep your eyes on the ground. You lose faith. And you don't realize how rich a life it is, all the while."

"I try to," he told her simply, as though she had been addressing her cosmic theory of disillusion just to him.

She smiled, and they rode a little way in silence. Then she spoke of Cassienda. She couldn't, she said, help feeling sorry for her. Of course she was queer; but her lot seemed strangely unhappy.

"Oh, but she'll get back her box now," replied Kenneth lightly, as though, from his careless point of view, one's happiness could very easily be contained in a box. "That is, if she *does* get it back." For he felt already half on the side of the enemy.

"Yes," admitted Cyprienne slowly, "but what will become of her?"

"Why, she'll sell it, of course."

"And then what?"

"Then? Why, after that she'll set up a beautiful fortune-telling parlour, and I will take you to have your palm read."

Cyprienne carried it on, subtly shifting, however, the current. "Do you fancy she could read you more from my palm than you have had already from my lips?"

"Well, I don't know," he answered shrewdly. "They see all sorts of things there. 'Lines crossing and crossing,' he added, quoting her, as though he would suggest that, after

all, the curious little tracery in the flesh might be a symbol for the larger human tracery in the great world of men and women.

And then the current shifted again. "I hope she'll be able to map out her life. It's easy to talk of mapping out new lives, but some women seem to have given everything already. Well, it's a strange world. You must be a woman and suffer before you understand."

He glanced up at her furtively. Thank goodness she wasn't crying. Her eyes were thoughtful, but they weren't wet. He sighed, and was very grateful for that much.

"After all," she continued, as they were carried along past gay shops and curtained cafés, "we have ourselves most often to blame." She had reference to her own life in particular, and somehow conveyed that without being more pointed. "The genus masculine," said she with a slight, hard smile—"as a genus, I mean, not *you*, Kenneth—is very notably lacking in humour. I've so often thought Barrie was right about the rib! And that," she added, as though to complete what might otherwise seem obscure, "is why we have ourselves to blame when things happen—when we ourselves, I mean, forget to be humorous."

"Wasn't it humorous, as you say, to find the mighty hunter?"

She smiled more softly and pressed closer to him. "Yes, there was no harm in finding the mighty hunter. It was only—other things, so many, many other things. There are difficult years in a woman's life, Kenneth dear. We have to be ever so humorous, sometimes. And if we aren't. . . ." She smiled sadly. But he understood pretty well. She had opened her heart to him.

They had by this time entered rue Racine and were approaching the house whose number stood out so crisply on the card which Kenneth was turning over and over excitedly inside his pocket.

"Tell me," suggested Cyprienne, "what he looks like, since you've already seen him."

"I'll tell you how the Señorita describes him," replied Kenneth with a laugh. "He's a handsome scoundral, with hair that waves—just the way women like it!—and eyes like a Spanceah sky."

They were at the gate.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE CAMP OF THE ENEMY

IT was not until he stood before the door itself that Kenneth became impressed with a consciousness of his mission's delicacy. He should have waited long enough to work out some sort of a programme. What on earth was he going to say when the door opened? Now, honestly—what?

But even rumination on his acute unpreparedness was snapped short. The door opened, and Kenneth faced the same man who had sat next to him that distant day in the 'bus. His eyes were lit with inquiry; but all immediate embarrassment was overthrown by his recognizing Kenneth, after just a puzzled moment, and drawing him in with a cordial handshake.

"By George!" he exclaimed, "it's my friend who wanted to dodge the broom! Well, this is quite jolly. I remember—yes, I remember perfectly. I might have passed you by on the street, in a crowd. But face to face it all comes back to me."

"I suppose I'm easily spotted," Kenneth admitted. "The way I dress: French to the ground, yet talking English like a house afire!"

The man laughed easily and led his caller into the living room. And then, since Kenneth didn't come out with the momentous substance of his errand, but dropped luxuriously into the most comfortable of the chairs, coolly crossed his legs, and fitted the tips of his fingers together in an attitude of entire and amusingly mature self-possession, Mr. Sterrett agreeably embroidered the only logical topic: that establishing the link between this and their first informal meeting.

"Well," he asked, "did you try it, then?"

"The progressive luncheon? Oh my, yes! I tried it the very next cleaning day. It worked perfectly."

"If you give me time," said Sterrett, "I believe I can remember everything you ate—that is, if you followed instructions. Wait a bit. Didn't we drive off with *escargots*?"

"Yes. Fine big fat ones. You should have been along!"

"Well," observed the enemy, looking just about as friendly as any one could possibly look, "this, at any rate, is second best. I haven't any snails to offer, though. Yes, after all, it is a pity I wasn't."

Kenneth was struck more even than upon the earlier occasion by the man's utter friendliness. It was distinctly a jarring note. How on earth could you hope to keep up the enemy camp illusion under such perverse conditions? "It's just the way I thought it would turn out," he sighed.

He hadn't exactly contemplated speaking the confession aloud. However, it was always better to get every sort of difficult business over with as quickly as possible. At least the ball was rolling now.

Naturally Mr. Sterrett didn't quite follow this. He was puzzled; but he smiled in the manner of one who suspects there may be rare and subtle fooling afoot. "What's turned out the way you thought it would?" he asked.

"I knew I'd regret not having come here in the first place and been on your side. But I've sworn an oath on the handle of a dagger. And—well, the devil! As it is. . . ." He didn't know quite how to put the rest of his perilous confession, but ended by characteristically blurting out the sheer naked fact. "As it is, I've come to warn you."

"Good!" said the enemy cordially. "Then I've still time for a get-away?"

"Oh, yes. Plenty of time."

"I suppose I could slip out under cover of the dark—that is, if you think it wouldn't do to wait over."

"You can't tell," Kenneth explained. "Of course it *might* do. If you don't mind risks."

"Now that you've warned me," suggested the enemy pleasantly, "it's just conceivable you might find it consistent to set me wise as to what the row's all about."

"Oh, yes," Kenneth assured him, "I'm quite ready to

make a clean breast. It's only fair. Then you can choose between pitching me out of the window and taking me for an accomplice. That is," he hesitated, "a *kind* of accomplice."

"You think you'd be a safe gamble?"

"Oh, perfectly safe. The only snag is the oath on the handle of the dagger. And I certainly don't see how we can ever get around that."

"Well, let's have the facts," suggested Sterrett. And by the way, I was just going out for a turn or two before dinner. Been cooped up here all day with some fellows from the Institute. How about a stroll? You don't mind? Good. And as we walk you can tell me what it's all about."

So Kenneth poured out the whole tale, speaking, now he was really started, with rather more coherence than previously. And the enemy walked along beside him absorbing it in amazed but always amused silence. It was evident this was, in a way, his notion of adventure as well as Kenneth's though the quality of his mirth bespoke an habitual indulgence in adventure of rather more grim and consequential calibre. When Kenneth had come to the end he glanced coolly up at the enemy, who looked more disconcertingly friendly than ever under the broad brim of his hat.

"And so Mr. Bromley's a lawyer," he mused, his eyes twinkling.

"Well," admitted Kenneth, "he was once. Pretty long ago, I'm afraid. And it's likely he's forgotten a good deal. But it makes the situation more awful, even at that, don't you think?"

"Oh, look here!" laughed Sterrett. "You're a most amazing youngster! Where on earth did you ever pick up all this smoothness?"

They had strolled over the river and up the Avenue. Now they sat down at one of the little tables under an awning outside the Café de la Paix.

"Well," replied Kenneth, "mostly from being boarded out all my life, I guess."

"Boarded out! Yes, that must be it. That was largely

my fate, too. It must be boarding out that starts us on the trail of moon-madness."

"You call it that?"

"Moon-madness? Oh, one term's as good as another. After all, the thing can't be very coherently tagged."

"Anyway, I'm glad you understand how it is," said Kenneth, shaking himself free, as it were, of the enveloping clouds of abstraction. "About the invention, I mean."

Mr. Sterrett beckoned a waiter and ordered some tea—good, strong tea, he specified. Kenneth aspired to a more exciting beverage than even the strongest tea. But Mr Sterrett seemed developing a very tiresome fear of leading his companion astray. Why the devil did people have to treat him like a baby?

"I'm sure I'm glad," he assured the other, "that you aren't my guardian. Bromley's strict enough, but there are about a hundred million ways of getting around him. I somehow feel it would be harder with you."

"Yes?"

"Yes, sir, I do. For instance, I don't suppose that you ever have anything so convenient as epochs to keep you from spoiling a fellow's fun?"

"Epochs?" He naturally didn't get it.

"Yes—that's what Mr. Bromley has. I don't know how I'd get along without them. They come and then they're gone again, and betweenwhiles it's quite rotten. Betweenwhiles I have to read him to sleep at night. He's really very hard to manage when there isn't an epoch. You can't imagine!"

Sterrett smiled appreciatively. No, he couldn't altogether imagine. When he brought out his cigarette case Kenneth assured him: "At least, you know, I smoke."

"You're sure?"

"Oh, there's absolutely no ban at all. The fact is, I've been bribed."

"Bribed?" Mr. Sterrett seemed more and more bewildered. But he also compromised, and Kenneth dived hungrily into the case.

"Yes. It's to keep me from going with women—one in particular."

"Aha!"

"Oh, it's nothing like what you think! Not that at all. He doesn't know I ever even saw any of that kind. It's the singer downstairs. We're great friends."

"So you've a singer in your house."

"Yes. She sings at the Opéra. She's ever so famous; but you forget all about that. She *makes* you."

"So charming?"

"Yes, sir," said Kenneth.

They filled up their cups, and then Mr. Sterrett wanted to know more about how he stood with Cassiendá. Had she actually come 'way up to Paris to get back her invention?

"Her poor brother's," Kenneth corrected. "She's very particular about the phraseology."

"Yes, yes—I know. The poor fellow was an awful dreamer. A queer, silent guy. You'd see him slipping through doorways and gliding out of sight. Then all at once he died. And this was all he left behind him—this great, mysterious box. It's a complete mystery, and probably as complete a humbug. I suppose there's always the chance, though, about the things we don't comprehend and never can. Especially the things we never can."

"Yes, sir," said Kenneth restlessly.

The man smiled, and hadn't after all, permanently wandered. For he came back directly: "At any rate, I always hoped the *Señorita would* make a fortune out of it—somehow. By the way," he added, "I'd no intention, you know, of running off with the thing."

"You hadn't?" Kenneth showed a shade of disappointment.

"After all," observed Starrett dryly, "I'm afraid it would be hardly worth such a risk. Fancy her coming on—! I told her I'd look around, and that it would, of course, take time. In any event. . . . But the letters must have gone astray. My mail always is. And I suppose not hearing.

...” He laughed a little. “You know—the Latin temperament!” And then he laughed again as he reviewed the relationship which Kenneth had painted in all its irresistible perversity—the relationship wherein Bromley figured. When he had sobered he began: “As for the invention—” Then broke off and cleared it all up with a gesture. “Here it is and here we are. Too bad the Señorita’s had so much fuss and worry. I wish, instead of the dusty old box, I could turn over a neat cheque instead. But perhaps Mr. Bromley, since it seems he’s to succeed me—”

Kenneth laughed gaily. “If you knew Mr. Bromley the way I do, you’d know what he’d say to that!”

“What would he say?”

Kenneth assumed a solemn, startled expression and said, imitating his guardian very successfully: “No, no! I have nothing to do with it—only to get it *returned*.”

“I see,” said Sterrett.

“But now,” proposed Kenneth, “since it won’t be really necessary for me to break my vow with the Señorita, and since I’ve warned you, are you going to take me in as an accomplice? I’ll have, of course, to stay on the other side to a certain extent—but not entirely. And if you don’t mind, there’s a great deal to be done before the invention is actually returned.”

“An accomplice, eh?”

“I’m sure it will be more exciting, from now on, if you’ll take me in.”

“After all,” admitted Sterrett, “can I very well do otherwise?”

“All things considered? No, I don’t honestly see how you can, sir,” agreed Kenneth. “I’m a kind of what-do-you-call-it? A kind of strategic unit. I think I’m much too valuable to turn down.”

“Then suppose we say it’s settled?”

So they shook hands over their empty cups, and the enemy’s friendliness ceased being outside the picture.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

. . . VERSAILLES QUAND MEME!

IT was Kenneth's design to bring about a reconciliation between Cassienda and Mrs. Brathers ere the fervour of the volatile Spaniard should have time to evaporate. He relished the idea of the encounter. It would certainly be delicious—especially if he could in some way contrive to be present and look on. But the plot was deeper still, and it seemed unlikely that he could witness the kiss which was to unite them for the rest of their lives in bonds of tender affection.

Kenneth was wholly taken up now with the invention campaign. Its importance assumed almost grotesque proportions, and his own importance seemed developing accordingly. It began to appear to Kenneth as though the world couldn't possibly keep going round without his connivance. Yet he looked very slim and small and young indeed as he went about plotting and scheming—slim and small and young, and, to the very, very discerning, perhaps even a little bit pathetic, as well.

The friendly enemy had happily neglected to wring from him a confession of the Señorita's whereabouts. He still held the cards, and there was at least no danger of the invention's being returned prematurely. To have it returned prematurely seemed far worse, now, than not to have it returned at all. How dreary that would be, with such possibilities afoot! And since it was certain, as he assured Cassienda, that persuasion, perhaps rather a good deal, would have to be brought to bear, could the Vœuf possibly be won over more deftly and completely than through the mediumship of the widow he adored? Kenneth figured that if the two widows could only

be brought to the kissing point, all would go well. A warm, sisterly smack was the thing to be desired above all else. Ah, he thought, all this was infinitely more exciting than St. Dunstan's, with its minor schoolboy escapades. *This was real life!*

The day following the long interview at the Gare Montparnasse, the Voeuf and Mrs. Brathers set out directly after breakfast for Versailles. The weather was certainly threatening. But it had not actually begun raining, so of course (*il fait beau temps s'il ne pleut pas*) they received no discouragement from Madame Bernard.

Driving to the station in a taxi, Mr. Bromley made nearly as great a ceremony of purchasing tickets as though the destination were his beloved Athens instead of merely the Place d'Armes. She sat and waited for him, spending the interim looking pleasantly about her. Mrs. Brathers never failed to find *something* interesting in her environment. Certainly she would never be brought to suicide through ennui! For instance, right now this minute, on an adjacent bench in the waiting room, there were two men paying court to a single lovely female enthroned between them. Who were they? It made no difference. Mrs. Brathers could not ask for a more delightful temporary occupation than deciding, in her own mind, which of the two men would make the more logical mate. To Mrs. Brathers it seemed that the world was just running over with romance. It spilled itself recklessly and magnificently through space. First, there was the immediate romance of her own life. But that was by no means all. The romance of one's own life might satisfy the average but never the Brathers appetite. When Mr. Bromley returned from the ticket grating, however, the little party on the other bench had broken up; and since there appeared to be no further love-making going on, the consequent slump had given Mrs. Brathers a moment to spend on herself. He found the fair brow slightly clouded.

"What is it?" he asked, his eyes very anxious and full of solicitude.

Her reply smacked of the commonplace, but to Mr. Bromley it bore a real impress of tragedy. "I've forgotten," she said, "to order a fresh bottle of my herb tonic."

"Tz, tz, tz! And you haven't any more at all?"

"No, I finished the bottle yesterday."

"Oh dear!"

Mr. Bromley had had solemnly impressed upon him the vital properties of the herb tonic. He had come to look upon the herb tonic as a sort of sublimated staff, without which the beloved must surely sink under the heavy cares and trials of life. Therefore it was with the profoundest concern that he asked: "Shan't I run now and order it? We've nearly seven minutes."

"Oh, you silly, silly man. Of course not. I don't want to carry a quart bottle of tonic out to Versailles." But she laid her hand upon her heart for a moment and coughed gently two or three times.

This, of course, was terrible, and Mr. Bromley began wringing his hands. "Hadn't we better put our little trip off until to-morrow?"

But this opening made it possible for her to think not of herself but of another's happiness. She smiled pathetically, the way Camille does in the last act, and said softly: "Oh, I daresay I shall get through. I'm determined to keep up. Only my doctor"—she added this in a tense undertone—"my doctor has warned me not to neglect the morning doses."

This herb tonic of which they spoke was a brown, venomous fluid, procurable only at a little pharmacie in the rue Cambon. Mrs. Brathers took it for both nerves and stomach, though the latter, as being utterly devoid of that more delicate aura of romance commonly attaching to afflictions of the nervous system, lived only between Mrs. Brathers and her physician. The tonic was pretty expensive. It took ever so many francs to keep the fragile widow up and about. Still, she wouldn't have it otherwise. She would never forgive her doctor if he stopped prescribing the herb tonic. It was the herb tonic, more than anything else, that kept alive in her the agonizing

suspicion that she was, in reality, a good deal worse off than the doctor would let her know. Also there was just a faint hint of something in it—a pleasantly exhilarating atom or so—which delighted the strictly abstemious widow palate.

But now, since it became evident that the seven minutes which Mr. Bromley said they had to spare had dwindled to only one and a fraction, Mrs. Brathers quickly abandoned the air of pensive langour and assumed in its place a mood of smart bustle. They hurried out to their train. She did not think of the herb tonic again all day. For the moment absolutely her only thought was lest they be left behind!

Two hours later, before a *Sacrifice to Pan* in the Grand Trianon, Mr. Bromley had just been rejected a second time. He sighed, of course, and she sighed also, though in a slightly less lugubrious register—just sufficiently less to put a gentle damper on his yearning to prolong the argument on into those apartments, once sacred to Napoleon I.

Now there was, though one with the necessarily limited perspective of the enamoured Voeuf might fail to vision it, something quite extraordinary and even superb underlying Mrs. Brathers' persistent refusals. Yes, there was this much real mystery, at least, about Mrs. Brathers: her destiny was swayed by a ghost!

The one vital, uncompromising need of her life was a man. Just a man. She yearned for a master. Her life seemed all ragged and inconsistent without one. And yet she had drifted along all these years because—because her destiny was swayed by a ghost!

Never meeting with any one who could, she felt, quite fill that high place adorned and vacated by her superb spouse, she preferred perfect memories to present bliss. And there hovered ever somewhere in the back of her mind the vaguely troublous recollection that one day when they had returned home from a church sociable she had promised Timothy she would never take another husband. And so it was, as we now see clearly, that her destiny was swayed by a ghost!

It was upon the subject of the late Timothy Brathers that his widow always felt most at her ease. She had a way of nestling up against his memory and defying life—especially in the trying hour of a fresh proposal. Diligently reviewing the greatness of the deceased, Mrs. Brathers felt as simple and sinless as a little child. To-day it was with an almost patriotic zeal that she discoursed upon the virtues of the vanished. He was her mainspring, just as he had always been her mainspring. And in this case mainspring is just another word for ghost!

From Mrs. Brathers' conversations—and they often smacked of the immortal—it always became evident that their union had proved one of those rare, unusual, perfect unions, where one party supplies everything the other lacks. According to her account Timothy was, above all else, an intensely "Masculine" type of man. A certain photograph framed in Victorian bronze which stood at present on the mantelpiece in Mrs. Brathers' room, belied her estimate, some felt, to the extent of arousing a suspicion that this splendid masculine quality might have been a few parts plain stubbornness. The suspicion had lived for the Voef. He had, indeed, on more occasions than one, stroked his beard before the photograph on Mrs. Brathers' mantel and let his suspicions run wild. But then, the Voef was prejudiced.

"After his death," she admitted somewhat abstractedly, and dimly realizing, even as she talked, that the place in which she now strolled was capable, if encouraged, of giving her dwindling historic sense quite a smart jog, "my friends were terribly worried about me for a long time. I tried travelling, but it only seemed to make me more wretched." They had strolled to the staircase leading to glories overhead—glories recalling Antoinette and du Barry. "Then I—I met a gentleman at Monte Carlo," she continued, lowering her gaze and displaying a slightly intensified rose in her cheeks, "who was such a very great consolation to me. Indeed," she cried more earnestly, "it was his courtesy and solicitude which did more than anything else—a great deal more, I'm sure,

VERSAILLES QUAND MEME! 157

than just travelling—to restore me to something like my old self. Isn't it wonderful," she ended, in a little burst of naïve enthusiasm, "the friends who are always waiting along the way to help us and—and *reveal* us to *ourselves*?"

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

A REFUSAL AND A SHOCK

BRIGHT and early the next morning Kenneth determined to sound his guardian as to the amount of argument which must be brought to bear in order to induce his tackling the Señorita's business.

He found the Voeuf in his bedroom, looking rather wan, even a little haggard. Mr. Bromley was trying very hard to read a marked newspaper printed in Greek, which had been sent on to him from Athens. Eléonore was mournfully making the bed.

"I see there's talk," Bromley announced in his dry, rasping, matter-of-fact tones, "of a new branch being built."

"A branch?" queried Kenneth.

Since they spoke in English, Eléonore pricked up her rural ears in vain.

"Yes, a street car spur. I can't just make out whether it's already built or only projected. I never could quite tell about the verbs."

He sighed heavily. Eléonore, as it happened, just then sighed also as she tenderly smoothed the widower's pillow.

Mr. Bromley folded up the Athenian journal and laid it by on the table, where there were more journals in the same difficult tongue. He rubbed his pale grey eyes and drew in lugubriously.

Bromley dejected was a very different man from Bromley high in hope. Solemn at best, he was positively funereal after rejection. Kenneth realized the moment as not over-auspicious. Still, it was also possible, he thought, that, having withstood a fresh rebuff, his guardian would be in the mood to clutch yet the more desperately. So he spoke out, employ-

ing a species of absurd, stiff phraseology which he copied from his elder, and which was quite common to the vaguely satirical conversations of this odd pair.

"I have come to consult you this morning," he began, "on a very important matter."

"Eh?"

"It's to act in the capacity of a lawyer."

"A lawyer?"

"I understand, sir, that you were one once."

"Why, so I was," cried Mr. Bromley with a slight flush of pleasure. "So I was. Yes, I was once a lawyer. I lost my practice through being involved in a swindle."

"I hadn't heard about the swindle, sir."

"Oh, of course I was innocent," Bromley hastened to explain. "It was a swindle about which I knew nothing—nothing at all till the papers came out with their horrid headlines."

"I should think it would be awful to come suddenly upon your name in the headlines," Kenneth observed.

"Oh, it was terrible, terrible!" cried the Voef, momentarily quite shaken.

"And that was the end of it? You never practiced any more after that?"

Mr. Bromley shook his large head mournfully. "My heart was broken. I never practiced again. I went to Spain for my health."

Eléonore had by this time given the last plausible touch to the bed. Indeed, she had two or three times furtively undone a little of her work, that she might prolong the somewhat dubious and certainly mixed delight of remaining nigh her first American gentleman. She asked timidly if Monsieur desired anything further.

He replied curtly that he desired nothing, and she went out.

"Well," pursued Kenneth, seizing upon Spain as a pivot, "the Señorita is in trouble, and there's a chance for you to help her out if you will."

"Kenneth!" cried the Voef, losing his undependable

temper. "How dare you speak of that woman after—after the incident in the salon? Besides, didn't I forbid you to have anything to do with her?"

"Sh-h-h!" Kenneth cautioned. "She might be next door."

But Mr. Bromley had heard her depart, and he spoke with grand fearlessness. "I don't care! She *ought* to know how reputable people regard her! I won't have you spending your time with that woman! I'll send you straight back to St. Dunstan's!"

"Please don't, sir," Kenneth pleaded. And then he added, on an impulse which was wild but circuitously promising: "I'll confess—I suppose it's time. I—I know all about it?"

"You know all about what?"

"All about the Señorita—and you!"

The inevitable profanity crept out. "Good God!"

"It was entirely an accident. I couldn't help—"

"You mean, of course, that she told you!" interrupted the Voeuf bitterly.

"No, no! The Señorita has told me nothing at all, sir. She has spoken of you always in the highest terms—never as a husband."

Albert Bromley looked desperately unhappy. Though neither himself nor his plight could possibly impress an outsider in any but a humorous way, still he was intrinsically a very tragic character. His situation was at length brim full of perplexity and even terror. Those inclined to the persuasion that Mr. Bromley's afflictions were always nine parts imaginary are respectfully invited and urged to bear in mind the vacuum, of almost grand dimensions, which stood in lieu of a saving sense of humour.

He shook his head dubiously, though his anger seemed mildly mollified. "Well," he said, "what trouble has she got into?"

Kenneth told him about the confiscated invention and touched upon the fact that her business in Madrid was ruined because of her having come up to Paris, relinquishing the field to rivals.

Bromley caught at this. "What?" he cried in mingled distress and disgust. "A fortune-teller?"

"Then was that after your time?" sparred Kenneth.

"What?"

"I say, was it afterward, sir, that she took it up?"

"Look here, Kenneth, do you mean to tell me she's a professional fortune-teller?"

"Yes, sir. She prefers cards. She promised to tell my fortune for nothing!"

"As payment for inveigling me, perhaps?"

Kenneth's eyes rejoiced. "No payment would be sufficient were I to succeed in engaging your services, sir."

"H'm. Did she say that, eh? Well, well. I don't know. I daresay I might be able to do something." (For she *must* be kept from telling!) "Today—today I'm very busy."

He was going shopping in the rue de la Paix with Mrs. Brathers.

"Tomorrow?" the boy suggested.

"Well, possibly tomorrow, or the next day. . . ."

"Still, in the meantime, supposing the thief should dispose of it?"

"Dispose of what?" asked Bromley a little vacantly.

"Of the invention."

"Oh, yes—the invention."

"She'd be left quite stranded, you know." And then, as though feeling that the victory had, after all, been a trifle too easy, he added: "Since the alimony was lumped. . . ."

Mr Bromley's eyes hardened. "She told you *that*?"

"I guessed it, don't you see, since she's without a steady income."

"Oh, it's all horrid and disgusting! Tz, tz!" He contracted his brow miserably, then went on speaking. "Listen, Kenneth. It was all a mistake—my marrying her. We—we weren't suited to each other. She admits it as well as I. We weren't compatible. So there was a divorce. Now why should she come back like this—after all these long years? Why *should* she?"

"In books," observed Kenneth brazenly and, temporarily, quite casting diplomacy to the winds, "I suppose there would be a reconciliation, or something."

"Did she speak of a thing of *that* sort, hey?" Bromley cried, his voice shrill and strained with terror. This was an unbearable piece of insolence, he stormed. No! He would not make a single move to help her now. First she had called him a donkey—oh, he didn't forget! Now she wanted to make it up with him—possibly even drag him to the altar again. At the very least, it was certain she was hankering after a second alimony. The flutter of an arrival next door caused him to lower his voice abruptly to the less impressive whisper register so frequently rendered urgent since the complications set in. But his wrath continued to pour itself out—or rather, now, to wheeze itself out. "No, I won't do a *thing!*" he ended, drawing his large mouth into as thin a line as possible.

There was a short silence. The time had come for tapping the supreme reserve.

"I thought it best to suggest your helping her, sir, because—because I was afraid Mrs. Brathers might be shocked if she were to know about you and the Señorita."

The Voeuf groaned again. "Is she going to her with the whole thing, then?" he asked helplessly.

"Oh, I don't know, only from one or two things I heard I thought she *might*, in case—in case you refused."

"In case I refused...." The unhappy man was at sea as to which refusal was implied. Did she mean if he refused to marry her again? Or give her another lump? Or what? "Oh, she'll spoil everything," he wailed.

Kenneth consoled him as well as he could. "That's what I'm afraid of, sir."

"But what am I to do?"

"You mean, to prevent it?"

"Yes, yes—to prevent it, at any cost!"

"I think if you give me your word that you'll help her get back the invention. . . ."

"Tz, tz! It sounds like blackmail."

"Of course there *might* have to be more. I don't just know."

"What a depraved creature! Oh, *dear!*" And then Mr. Bromley's eyes narrowed. He looked at the boy sharply. "Look here, Kenneth," he whispered, "you're not playing a game on me, are you?"

"Sir?"

"I say, I'm beginning not to believe a word of it! I don't *believe* she'd dare go to Mrs. Brathers, after the shameful way she treated her. No, I don't! It's a bluff! I *won't* lower myself to have anything to do with her! No, I simply won't! You—yes, you may go and say so to her!"

"I'm afraid, sir, she'll go straight and tell."

"No, I don't believe a word of it. I haven't been a lawyer in my time for nothing. No! I'm determined to assert myself and be the master. The thing has gone too far!"

He spoke with considerable grandeur, though the sibilant register required because of the adjacency of his dreadful former wife naturally detracted a little.

"Well," concluded Kenneth, whose wildest dreams seemed about to be realized. "All right. Then I'll tell her what you say." He walked to the door and turned. "I'll be back directly, sir, and tell you what she says."

"You may tell her I'll—I'll not be browbeaten!" were the Voëuf's parting words, though, to tell the truth, he was beginning to feel a little bit shaky.

"Come een!" she called. But what followed was inaudible to Mr. Bromley, though, as may be supposed, his ear was pressed very close to the keyhole. Kenneth, with a finger on his lips, established the same pitch of communication adopted previously on the other side of the partition.

"Oh, if my proud father could see how humbled I am!" she lamented.

"Never mind. The chances are he can't. This is the last move we have left."

"Then you think he *weel* agree?"

"If all goes well, I'm sure of it! All you have to do is walk right up to her door and knock."

"Well, I'll go. Yes, I am quite humbled by this time. There is nothing left in the world but to beg. I have lost everytheeng!"

She sniffed a little, primed a moment before her glass, perked the enormous bow in her hair, and announced that she was ready.

Kenneth saw her depart along the hall and down the half flight to the dining room. When she had crossed the dining room and reached the main hall of the apartment, he burst madly into his guardian's room. So noiseless had been this departure that Mr. Bromley was still bent to the keyhole. He straightened quickly and faced about.

"What's the matter now?" he asked in real fright.

"Quick, this way! She's off."

"Off where?"

"You'd better be very quick, sir!"

"She's going to Mrs. Brathers?"

"Yes, yes!"

The two ran out into the hall. Bromley had never dreamed she would dare! It was a terrible, an agonizing moment.

Together they sped down the stairs. The air was charged with the rather overpowering scent of the lady who had just gone that way. Bromley made queer noises in his throat.

The rooms they hurried through were deserted. Señorita was out of sight—a fact which naturally added spice to the chase.

"I must catch her in time!" cried Bromley with wildness in his voice.

"I'm afraid it's too late," said Kenneth.

It was.

Just as they reached the corner of the main hall, from which point, down a long corridor, Mrs. Brathers' door could be glimpsed, Señorita Ferruco was already tapping. At this distance her back looked unspeakably pitiful. The shoulders

drooped despondently. She was, indeed, after her stormy life, reduced to the methods of a mendicant.

Mr. Bromley was going to rush forward to prevent her gaining admittance to his lady's chamber, but at that very moment the door opened, and Mrs. Brathers stood there on the threshold. The two widows were face to face. There was a kind of hysterical babble. Then the Señorita was admitted, and the door closed.

Bromley turned helplessly toward Kenneth.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

TOOTHACHE

THEY were booming a new oil concern in Tulsa, Oklahoma. At one time and another in his extraordinary career, Mr. Sterrett had dabbled in oil. He had bought on a hunch and developed more than one oil well, and put the potential product in the hands of an underwriting house, which in turn put it on the curb. This method left him free to go on with other ventures. He had, indeed, made two or three small fortunes in oil, only, as he put it, to have them snatched away before he could get to the deposit window of his bank.

Spread out before him now were a number of documents, all extolling the unusual attractiveness of the new site. It was, the prospectus claimed, a very wonderful opportunity indeed—three thousand acres—undoubtedly a ten to fifteen thousand barrel well—should have no trouble selling for ten million dollars. Sterrett sighed. Yes, they always promised richly. But he knew from very bitter experience what it was to dig down into a duster. Or what usually happened, when he had anything to do with an enterprise, was that they uncovered a tremendous pressure of gas—gas that would hurl up a column so stiff that you could not drive a baseball bat through it—and then, instead of coming to the expected layer of oil, would reach instead the third layer—salt water! Yes, he knew what to look for in these promises—or rather underneath them.

And he pushed the papers aside, though dreamily rather than impatiently. Somehow today he was in no mood for this sort of thing. Then what was he in the mood for? It was curious, but he had felt this way many times since com-

ing up to Paris. He felt very youthful and also very restless. It was like a case of Spring fever.

Strolling out into his big room, he stirred the log fire, filled his pipe, began pacing about. He paused before the octagonal invention. "Poor old Ferruco," he muttered, kicking the base of the ungainly object with his toe. Within the past few days, at his invitation, numerous French scientists and promoters had called to look at the Señorita's big box. His zeal in her behalf, if somewhat belated, had, at any rate, made up for lost time. These were the men he had had in mind when he suggested taking it along to Paris. But it wouldn't sell. It inspired mild interest, faint alarm, universal scepticism. Well, perhaps her new champion, Mr. Bromley—he grinned and then laughed aloud over it—perhaps he would succeed better.

And just as he was turning away, deciding to take a brisk walk in the gardens of the Luxembourg as a means of releasing some of this amazing store of pent-up restlessness which possessed him today, Sterrett was summoned downstairs to the 'phone. On the 'phone were some friends from England—the Gillinghams and Sir Oliphant Drew—just arrived, yes—staying at the Hôtel du Rhin—wanted him for dinner that night, and afterward the opera—he'd come?—good! (Mrs. Gillingham was very flattering, She knew how to be. It always seemed sheer ingratitude to refuse her anything.) And yet, as Sterrett climbed back up for his coat and walking stick he told himself that the evening promised to be a bore. If Sir Oliphant had done the talking, he would have contrived to beg off—certainly he would have managed to get out of going afterward to the opera. Mr. Sterrett never went to the opera. He hadn't been to the opera three times in ten years—and groaned at the impending prospect.

But fate came to his rescue; and, after all, he was spared the ordeal. No sooner had he got to the Luxembourg Gardens than it began to rain. Then it hailed. And the more riotous the elements grew, the more vigorously Mr. Sterrett plowed on. He pulled his old hat down over his eyes, lowered

his head, and sailed along. He forgot about the Gillinghams and Sir Oliphant Drew. He forgot that he had pledged himself into a box at the Opéra. He forgot about the Tulsa oil project. He forgot all his business perplexities—everything; and just gave himself up to that inexplicable mood of optimistic friskiness which was so strong upon him. When at length he got back to his rooms he was soaked and had to change his clothes. The fire on the hearth had gone out. He debated starting another and decided, since he must so soon depart, that it wouldn't be worth while. So instead he went to his desk and began mulling over the Tulsa oil proposition again.

Just when the ache set in he could not say. But at the precise moment when he read: "We may get oil at fourteen hundred feet, but we intend going thirty-five hundred and opening up a real oil pool," Mr. Sterrett was first conscious of a dull pain in one of his lower-storey teeth. He rubbed his cheek impatiently. He pressed with one finger against his cheek over the spot where the pain persisted. "What the devil!" he growled. For he never had anything the matter with his teeth. He hadn't had a toothache since he was a small boy. What could it mean? And then, with a little throb, the pain entirely ceased. He sighed with relief. Some passing whim, it must have been, of the mechanism inside his lower jaw. One's nervous system was like a magnificent network of wires. Wonderful thing, one's nervous system. He smiled in real appreciation. Strange how one lived year after year with one's nervous system and never stopped to realize how wonderful it was. No doubt two of the wires had managed to get crossed for a few minutes. You could hardly expect so vast a system to run forever without getting any short-circuits.

He turned back to the prospectus before him. It drew to its conclusion with the usual sort of clause: "You cannot expect to make big money unless you speculate." And it was true enough. Yes, he had learned that—over and over again. You must play to win—unless, of course, you hap-

pened to possess one of those enviable, methodical, sensible personalities which can face without a quaver the prospect of a life of slow, steady earning—moderate gains, and guaranteed, with no plunging. Well, he thought, I'll look into this Tulsa proposition. But he couldn't speculate heavily, for just at present Mr. Sterrett was in something the same fix as Cassianda. He would have to sell something before long or one of his periods of financial panic would be upon him.

Just as Sterrett was fingering the small attached slip whereon one was invited to enter one's application for stock in the Tulsa oil business, a new and this time terrific pain shot down through the same tooth. It was such a horrible pain that it made him jump right out of his chair. He had never had such a pain in his life. Pain was, as a matter of fact, a thing he knew very little about; and, being an essentially masculine person, despite his undeniable sense of humour, Mr. Sterrett was naturally filled with terror. He was not a coward in any of the conventional associations of the word. He could face any issue of life without flinching. But not a toothache! Another vicious spasm clutched his tooth. The tooth seemed to rock with the torture of its own conflict. It seemed to rise right up toward the roof of his mouth and settle back quiveringly. If, under this awful stress, the tooth had actually found a voice and begun bellowing, the phenomenon could not have caused Mr. Sterrett any very violent surprise. He gingerly took the offending tooth between his thumb and first finger. It seemed to be a little bit loose. Then the knife-like pain was upon it again, and his features contracted with uncontrolled horror. It seemed to him that he could not possibly live through another of those bayonet stabs. Something would have to snap somewhere. It was enough to petrify all the nerves in the body. It was enough to cut off the action of the lungs, which had been faithfully and automatically functioning for over forty years. It was enough to make the heart stop dead in its tracks. *Ouch!*

Mr. Sterrett would have been called a brave and fearless

and daring person up to now. Yes, up to four o'clock this afternoon no one could have reproached him on the score of personal courage. Now, at fifteen minutes past four, he was a raving coward. His face was pale. He felt wobbly, and there was perspiration on his brow.

Well, something must be done, at once. He couldn't last long at this rate. It must be his magnificent reserve that was keeping him up. It must be living so much out of doors. He rushed and got his hat—plunged down to the street and got hold of a taxi—promised the driver double fare if he could transport him to the workshop of Dr. Henry before the clocks struck another quarter. There had been times when he had looked upon Old Bob with something very like scorn. He had smiled at his overpoweringly prophylactic organism, his perpetual wintergreen breath, his flawless fingernails. Just now he thought of old Bob as the very essence of all that is best in human nature. Yes, he yearned for old Bob. And before they had even crossed the river, the driver was offered triple fare. So far as Mr. Sterrett was concerned, he had no really substantial hope of reaching his destination alive, so he could afford to be perfectly reckless in the meanwhile. There would be small headlines: "Middle Aged American Dies in Taxi," or "Taxi, Running Wild, Plunges into the Seine." He wasn't sure that an effectual smashup wouldn't represent the easier expiration.

At last, after hours of mad torture, and just as the clocks began to chime half past four, the taxi arrived at the office in the rue St. Augustin. He handed the driver a bill and tore inside; took the steps like a cyclone; and, panting and wild of eye, found himself in the spotless presence of the American dentist. In two seconds he was sitting up very straight in the red upholstered dental chair, his head back against a clean paper-cased pillow, his feet thrust stiffly against the apparatus appropriate to such uses, which bore, in delicate tracery of cast iron, the monogram of the American firm whence this throne of agony had originally wended its way overseas. And Dr. Henry had his clever little mirror click-

ing along the lower row of teeth, and his evil-looking little explorer prying about in utter disregard of any exposed nerves which it might any moment run smack into.

Of course, now that Mr. Sterrett was actually in the chair and faced with the obligation of defending his precipitation there, the tooth immediately stopped shooting. It was as mild and painless as any tooth in his head. Indeed, it was almost embarrassing. But the dentist, it seemed, did not require that there should be any pain at the moment in order to ascertain what was the trouble. He was a very highly developed dentist, and knew, almost by intuition, what was the matter—though behind this intuition, naturally, was the framed diploma from a dental college in Cincinnati which hung on one of the immaculate walls of the office.

The tooth that had been misbehaving was one which had been honoured, many years ago, with a crown of gold. It had still a very regal look; but underneath the top of grandeur a lowly nerve had fallen ill and died. The beautiful crown had become loosened. In a moment it was off in the dentist's hand. He scrutinized it with professional interest and held it up to the light. The top of the crown was perforated in a number of places. "No wonder!" the dentist laughed shortly. Then he sprayed out the cavern and drilled and drilled until it seemed to Sterrett there couldn't possibly be any of the old tooth left unpulverized.

"It's a wonder you haven't had trouble before this," said Dr. Henry pleasantly, turning on a nice-smelling spray.

"Nerve seems to be dead—weather may have brought this on—I'll have to go in and clean out the canal. But this will hold for today. You won't have any more trouble—or not very much. After the canal's in order I'll put in a gutta-percha filling, then, a new crown, and you'll forget you ever had a toothache."

Sterrett looked at his friend helplessly but reproachfully. "Forget? Oh, no! But then, you dentists don't know what it is to suffer!"

There were other poor devils in the waiting room, so

Sterrett dared not linger. In his shaken and relaxed condition he would have liked staying on for a consoling smoke with Old Bob. But it couldn't be done. The latter followed him out through the private passageway which led to his living quarters.

"I never can go to that beastly dinner tonight," said Sterrett plaintively. "You don't know what I've been through. How could you? You're only a dentist. I shan't stir out a step tonight. On the way home I'm going to stop in at Emile's for a bowl of hot milk toast. And I'm going to spend the evening at my own fireside. Let me use your 'phone a minute. I'll ring them up at the hotel and explain. If you only knew what it was to have a jumping tooth, damn it, you wouldn't smile!"

He ate his milk toast in a mood of bolstering self-pity. Thank God the toothache was only a memory now. But it was a memory whose vividness, he felt sure, would never, never fade. And then he went home and built up a good warm fire and put on his slippers and dressing gown and began reading *Tom Jones* again, because it was the most soothing book he could think of, with the possible exception of *Don Quixote*. And he kept chuckling over having got out of going to the opera.

But as the evening wore on Sterrett began feeling restless. Instead of falling, as he had expected, into a comfortable state of sleepiness, he found himself, hour by hour, growing more hopelessly alert. The mere satisfaction over his deliverance began to grow rather threadbare. He wasn't used to the monotony of an evening at home. When his clock struck half past eleven he could stand it no longer. He resolved to take off his slippers and go into town—just for a breath of air, he told himself, and a glass of something at one of the Boulevard cafés.

Sterrett walked briskly all the way over to the Café Anglais and sat down at one of the little tables outside. He sipped a glass of sherry and drank a demi-tasse. By this time

the theatre crowds were streaming past. The city was full of gaiety and light. He watched the people endlessly sauntering in quest of more entertainment. At half past twelve he left the café and strolled back toward the Avenue de l'Opéra.

Just as he was passing along behind the dark mass of the Opéra he noticed a brightly lighted little doorway from which some of the singers were emerging. He had succeeded in fooling them! Yes, they had had to sing tonight without the compensation of his presence out front. He smiled with whimsical cunning. But as he was crossing the cheerful path of light which spread out like a strip of carpet from the threshold of the stage entrance, a woman clad in furs hurried forth. She walked quickly toward a low carriage drawn up beside the curb. An ancient looking driver was climbing down from his seat. And then Mr. Sterrett forgot everything else in the world, including himself—stared at her for a swift, incredulous moment—cried out and strode toward her.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

A LITTLE JOURNEY IN HEAVEN

HAD any one of the inmates of Maison Bernard happened along just at this fateful moment (which none did) the inmate, striving to recover from the first shock of this meeting outside the stage entrance, would have been treated to the shock of hearing Mr. Sterrett call the singer by a wholly new name, only to be shocked still again by hearing her answer to it as though it were the name by which every one knew her. In fact, at this point, it would be necessary for the amazed inmate to decide that the singer's real name was not Cyprienne at all but a much humbler one, and would henceforth have to know her as Anna—quite an upsetting experience, surely, for any one cherishing the theory that, in some inexplicable manner, one's name is an essential and ineradicable portion of one's personality.

"Anna—Anna!" he called to her breathlessly.

And she, very pale and coming slowly toward him, her hands stretched out, answered: "Why, *Hugh!*"

It was thus they came together. The town was in a happy, musical uproar about them. It was like the sound of many waters. Their hands met, and they stood amazed, silent a moment, both hypnotized by an emotion which held them almost as in a state of trance. She was the first to break through.

"I can't believe it, Hugh. I *can't*. But where did you come from? How did this ever *happen?*"

"I don't know," he replied, his voice all husky and feeble. "I feel quite weak. Is this your carriage?"

"Yes," she told him. "This is François, Hugh." They

were walking dazedly toward the waiting Victoria. "I've had him for years—every winter. François, this is a very old friend of mine—Mr. Sterrett, François."

"I'm sure I'm pleased to meet you," stammered Mr. Sterrett in French, and held out his hand, while the ancient man, bewildered by so unexpected an introduction, hurriedly began pulling away at his woolen glove.

Cyprienne came partially to while this effort was under way, realized the ridiculousness of introducing any one to your coachman, laughed quite shrilly, and said: "It's all right, François. We'll drive along now."

"Home?" asked the *cocher*, instinctively resuming his station in life.

"Yes, home. Will you ride along with me, Hugh? Were you rushing off somewhere when—this thing happened?"

"No," he answered hurriedly. "Oh, no." He helped her in and climbed in after her. "Yes, I'll ride along—home with you, Anna."

"Clkkk!" said François, employing the esperanto which horses respond to all round the world. And they were off.

"I wish," laughed Sterrett, "I'd asked François to pinch me before I got in. It simply isn't possible—I know that perfectly well. And yet the carriage seems substantial, the crowds look like real people, I surely recognize all the familiar landmarks of the city. . . ."

"Perhaps," she suggested, laughing too, just a bit hysterically, "it would do just as well if I were to pinch you—or might that seem merely a part of the same colossal hoax?"

"I'm afraid so," he replied, with almost a tone of honest concern.

And then, simultaneously, all at once, they really, rationally and sanely met.

"Anna!" he whispered. And beneath the polar bear rug his hand sought eagerly for hers.

"Hugh, dear—*dear!*" she said. And she gave him both her hands. He pressed them very tightly in both his. For quite a way they said nothing more; but currents of intoxi-

cation seemed flooding them, drowning them in the ecstasy of this so unlooked for confluence.

"Hugh, dear," she said at last, very softly. "Hugh, dear. . . ."

"I can't say anything just now."

She looked up at him and saw his eyes brimming with tears. They had, both of them, an awed, exalted look.

As the carriage jogged along over the Seine, the beauty of the night (for the storm had passed and the stars were quite bright) seemed rivalling, in a way, the beauty of their own little drama. Some of the awe and exaltation gave way to a feeling of immense, quiet, almost homely joy.

"Well," said Mr. Sterrett with a reviving burst of his funny bluntness, which she remembered with a kind of ache, "you don't look a day older, Anna." It was a desperate effort on his part to establish something—to bestow on this miraculous chance a plainer quality which should outlive the night and let their meeting be a reality tomorrow, not a reartbreaking dream.

And she felt just as he did. "Oh, come!" she admonished. "No, I mean it."

"Well, for that matter, Hugh, you haven't changed either. I guess," she added dreamily, "you never will. You were always a big boy. Just that, Hugh *dear!*"

He slipped an arm about her, and she snuggled against his shoulder, her eyes narrowing with happiness.

"But we've so much to say," he cried. "Where do you live? Are we nearly there now?"

"Yes, Hugh, we're almost there." She drew a deep breath and sighed. "Such a short ride it's been—hasn't it? And we've so much to say!"

"Won't you let me come in?" They were drawing up to the curb in rue Jacob. "I can't let you go after just finding you."

She looked at him long and thoughtfully. Her eyes were troubled. "There are reasons, Hugh dear. Reasons why it would be better if you didn't."

"Your husband?" he murmured.

She shook her head and lights came and went in her eyes. "My husband has been dead nearly twelve years, Hugh."

"Twelve years—Anna! Twelve years!"

"Yes," she said simply.

He was out on the sidewalk, feeling the pressure of her hand in his as she stepped out beside him. And again the sense of unreality was strong upon him. It seemed to him that in a moment or two he must surely waken and find himself still at the Café Anglais nodding and dreaming over his demi-tasse.

"Good night, Hugh," she said, her lips very close to his ear. "Let's just be happy over this tiny ride for tonight. And tomorrow—tomorrow. . . ."

"May I come then?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes," she answered with a rush of fine tenderness. "Yes, dear, just as early as you will. Or, what will be better, Hugh, let me come to you. Or, better still, suppose we both meet somewhere—in the Tuileries garden, if the weather's fine. And we can sit on one of the benches, Hugh, just like foolish young lovers, and try to take up the old threads where we dropped them."

"On a bench in the Tuileries?" He brightened. "All right. I think I'll go there right now, and wait for morning. Then we'll be perfectly sure of a bench. And—I can never sleep after this!"

"Nor I, Hugh dear," she said.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

THE VOEUF SUBMITS AT CLOSE QUARTERS

EXACTLY what transpired behind Mrs. Brathers' closed door was never known. It is true, Mrs. Brathers took Mr. Bromley into her confidence, while Señorita Ferruco gave Kenneth as complete an account as seemed possible. But somehow, neither of the widows offered a quite coherent report. The interview, one deduced, was highly charged with suspense and richly embroidered with sentiment. There were some tears shed on both sides. Since Mrs. Brathers was naturally a gentle and peace-loving soul, anything like sustained animosity was dreadfully bewildering. When she saw the shrinking and humble little Spanish woman standing at her door one must picture a great wave of remorse and compassion and affection as overwhelming her.

A sweet intimacy developed. But the thing Kenneth had not counted on was the fact that all this was to end by making a very real difference to his accomplice. Cassienda had gone begging, after long and stormy protest, a confessedly pecuniary stimulus urging her forward. Five minutes later her whole being had undergone a striking change. Here, for perhaps the first time in her life, Cassienda began experiencing the delight of another woman's frank and disinterested, if rather hysterical, friendship. No one could possibly have foreseen such a tremendous emotional shakeup!

All things were instantly forgiven. It was like the last act of a popular play. The slates were sponged. Madame Bernard rejoiced at the unexpected release of tension among her pensionnaires. Kenneth shrewdly, and of course most confidentially, told her what he had done, and Madame warmed

toward the occupant of the "toute petite"—even ordered the cook to make him a large special plum tart on the very next baking day.

As for the Voeuf, naturally his relief over this most unexpected turn in affairs was something immense! The terrible strain was over. Though the prospect of the Voeuf was by no means yet a rosy one, still he sensibly decided that it was better to have a hundred minor worries than the one horrible major one: that ceaseless and convulsing fear lest Mrs. Brathers be brutally told the whole awful truth about his past. The danger, in another form, was undeniably still a reality. . . . But it was somehow less terrible to contemplate.

Mrs. Brathers simply outdid herself. For days it looked as though the widow's affections were bodily transferred, as though they had gone over entirely from the widower to the woman who had once borne his name. When the ebb was lowest, Bromley exclaimed to himself: "Can she have told? Can she?"

Gradually, however, the basic longing of Mrs. Brathers' nature began reasserting itself. After all, Cassienda wasn't a man. In short, the novelty wore off in something less than a week; and while the most confidential and gushing sort of friendship continued to exist between the two widows, the lady of Scranton slipped gently back again into communion with the solemn Voeuf.

The intense emotional stress of this new arrangement in their lives carried the inmates of Maison Bernard along some time on its current. They submitted themselves to it. Bromley's destiny began soaring and singing again. He thought, of course, that Cassienda had simply surrendered on the threshold—didn't *dream* she had gone prepared! He went about telling himself, with secret chuckles, that the Epoch, while it had certainly escaped demolition by a very narrow margin, was happily entering now upon a new lease of life. In a word, he revived.

Yet Cassienda, for all her wonderful new sense of joy and peace, began recognizing, almost in spite of herself, that, so

far as the invention went, the episode of the kiss had scarcely benefited her. . . .

"See, see!" she complained softly yet with a definite note of foreboding to Kenneth. "I have done all that you weeshed, and steel he goes not!"

"We must make the supreme attempt," Kenneth firmly replied. "There are two things to be done. You must get Mrs. Brathers to speak, while I try my best to make him see that perhaps the worst is yet to come."

"I will do as you wish," said the chastened lady. Slant rays of Indian Summer were beginning furtively to stream across her landscape. And how little it took, after all! How little to dissolve the harshness which had become her native element!

"She didn't tell after all," observed Kenneth cheerfully to his guardian. Mr. Bromley gazed at him with a mixed expression. He had an uncomfortable sense of being not quite free any more, of being, to greater or less degree, in other people's power. Though he smiled wanly, he sighed also.

"No," he replied, "I'm convinced she didn't, after all."

"If," murmured the boy, looking vacantly past his guardian, "it only lasts. . . !"

"If it lasts?"

"Yes, if only she doesn't blab it all out in some spasm of confidence. . . !"

The smile had died in the pale gray eyes of the Voeuf. The corners of the large mouth drooped. Mr. Bromley sat solemnly without saying anything for a little while. Here was the awful doubt revived to almost its old-time vigour because someone else recognized it. In a very subdued and somewhat scared voice he asked: "You *do* think there's still danger?"

"Maybe not," said Kenneth. "Still, I suppose you can't really trust two women together. You can't be sure what might happen, I mean."

"Tz, tz, tz! I really almost thought everything was all right again."



"Maybe it is, sir. I hope so. Only"—he assumed the most sympathetic tone of which he was capable—"it would seem to me the danger's really far greater than ever before."

"You really think it is?"

"Well, sir, you know how it is when women sit gossiping together—all sorts of things come out. I just passed the salon door, and there they sat together—knitting. I thought as I went by, if *anything* could make her tell—"

"My head's all in a whirl!" cried the Voeuf.

But Kenneth's was amazingly steady. "Even now," he murmured, "as we sit talking here. . . ."

"Oh, I couldn't bear to have her know! She might forgive the marriage, perhaps, but she would never forgive the deception—never!"

No, Albert Bromley didn't understand women very well. The lady who inspired his present devotion was a perfect enigma. Otherwise he must at least have suspected that Mrs. Brathers was a woman capable of forgiving, in her own good time, far worse things than this!

And Señorita Ferruco carried out her side of the programme too. She told Mrs. Brathers the whole story of the theft, and hinted, as Kenneth assured her she must, that a lawyer alone could see justice done her. Mrs. Brathers fell right in. "Why," she exclaimed, "Mr. Bromley was once a lawyer. He told me so himself. He can't have forgotten all the law he used to know. I've heard that if you are once a lawyer you really remain a lawyer all your life. I shall certainly speak to Mr. Bromley about it at once. I'll get him interested in the case, and I'm sure he'll be glad to proceed for you, dear Cassienda—if I ask him to."

The Señorita looked at her oddly for a moment. "Yesss," she said slowly, "it is so. If you ask him. And *weel* you?"

"I will indeed, and without any delay."

The two widows held hands fondly a few moments. Then Mrs. Brathers started straight off to carry out her side of the agreement.

With Kenneth's subtle preparation, Mr. Bromley was indeed in a frame of mind to be approached. Of course, Mrs. Brathers' slightest whim would always be instantly obeyed. But his urgent desire to put the other widow so deeply in his debt that she would no longer stand as an even potential menace to his happiness made the alacrity of his promise to help almost breath-taking.

It was close to dinner time of the same day when Mr. Bromley tapped on the door between his room and Cassienda's. Kenneth was huddled in the center of his guardian's bed, rocking himself slowly, and clasping his shins in the air over his head.

"What is it?" she asked in a wee voice.

"Er—is that you, Cassienda?" (As though it could be anyone else!)

"Yes, it is me, Albert."

Kenneth rocked more noisily, and the Voeuf turned on him an admonishing frown.

"Er—Mrs. Brathers has been telling me about your invention."

"My poor brother's," she corrected gently.

"Yes, yes, your brother's. I remember he was always drawing up plans and things. Mrs. Brathers has told me that a fellow has run off with it, and has it here in Paris."

"A villain for the prison—a life sentence. . . ."

"Yes, yes. If you wish I will see what I can do about getting it back again."

"Oh, thank you!"

"I—I daresay I could manage," he told her with supreme vocal monotony.

"Then I will put it all in your hands, Albert!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

A DISAGREEMENT OVER A FEW POTATOES

MRS. BRATHERS beamed on everyone. She had a new purpose in life now. It was to champion the widow her Voeuf. She radiated the important rays of her own beneficence. In short, so very great was the delight of Mrs. Brathers at finding herself a person of such recognized consequence that she determined, the very evening of Mr. Bromley's promise to assist, upon entertaining her friends with a little informal party in her bedroom.

There were, at first, a few widow qualms about the propriety of receiving in such intimate quarters. But these were gently and firmly sidetracked. "After all, we're mostly Americans," she argued. And that somehow made all the difference in the world.

Although it was already after dinner when Mrs. Brathers determined upon giving the party, and although there was naturally very little time for preparation, she slipped out of the salon quite confidently, bent on a judicious spending of such moments as remained. Mr. Bromley sprang out after her, demanding in a tone of the most excessive solicitude if there wasn't something he could do to help.

"It's to be kept a secret—from Madam, I mean," whispered Mrs. Brathers a little breathlessly.

"A secret?"

"Well, yes. For you see I don't think she would entirely approve. It doesn't quite come under the pension rulings."

"Yes, yes," nodded the Voeuf with gratifying intelligence.

Mrs. Brathers went on speaking, very softly and with a rather hysterical flutter of mystery: "I'm going out to confer

with Eléonore. I know she'll be wonderfully secretive for a couple of francs."

Mr. Bromley's hand went instinctively down into his pocket, but he wisely drew it out again empty. After all, this wasn't an equivalent of paying her way in a 'bus or cashiering the bill at one of their little tea parties.

"You might," she suggested coyly, "go back into the salon and take the rest aside, very carefully."

"So it won't be noticed?"

"Yes, one at a time."

He nodded and stroked his beard rapidly.

"Suppose we say—nine-thirty?"

"Oh—all right," the Voeuf whispered loudly, falling more and more delightedly in with the cryptic arrangement. And he went back to the salon, while Mrs. Brathers stole craftily away to the kitchen.

As it happened, domestic developments this evening rather favoured an internal plot such as that set afoot by the widow of Scranton. Something altogether out of the ordinary occurred: Monsieur Bernard remained in the salon. And since Monsieur Bernard never remained in the salon after dinner, this break in habitude argued an impendency of some sort, which promised to keep Madame safely occupied. The air was subtly charged.

Monsieur Bernard stood before the mantelpiece, his hands spread out behind him over an imaginary blaze. There never was a nice cosy little fire in the salon. It would represent a luxury ill-fitting the collapsed Bernard fortunes. What heat there was poured up, a dry, hot blast, through a mural register in the vicinity of Madame's chaise longue. Madame Bernard had the warm corner. It was Monsieur who always rubbed his hands at a chill and draughty flue. But then, it must be remembered that the lease was in Madame's name.

Yes, there was certainly something bréwing. And yet Madame lay quite serene on her chaise and stitched with quiet blitheness. Monsieur Bernard looked off darkly before him.

His great round eyes began displaying an alarming tendency to protrude. More and more of the whites became visible. Still, thus far it was a normal, quiet, well-ordered evening at home. The lingering presence of the head of the house was the only alien note.

Mr. Bromley went about the salon, drolly flitting from group to group, meticulously covering up the real kernel of his talk beneath a shroud of the usual daily patter. When Mr. Bromley spoke of trivial things the effect was always quite amusing; for in proportion to the diminished consequence of substance there was sure to develop an enlarged seriousness of bearing. This constituted what had at least the appearance of a sly many-sidedness. There were those who even looked upon Albert Bromley as a versatile man.

Mrs. Brathers entered, fresh from a seduction of Eléonore, who had agreed to smuggle in certain appropriate delicacies from the kitchen. The lady contrived to conceal her guilt under the guise of spritely, talkative innocence—distinctly one of the best things she did. "Oh Madam," she said with what breath remained, "*il faut que je vous dise quelques choses que j'ai vue* (she pronounced it "view") *aujourd'hui!*" And she sat down and poured out her most fluent, villainous French by way of assuring Madame Bernard that she had every intention of going straight to bed when the proper hour arrived for quitting the salon. "Madam! *Il était un homme cassé sous les pieds d'un cheval dans la rue!*" (pronounced to rhyme with "moo").

"Yes," Miss Curtis was saying very earnestly to Jacques, "the art of the future is going to represent almost exclusively the genius of the impressionistic school."

Jacques stood near the Chinese cabinet smoking, and he resigned himself to the rhapsody which flowed from the ardent lips of this very earnest and ardent young lady, who, seated near him, clasping her knees after the manner of Sappho at the Louvre, looked up at him through her omnipresent "sure-ons."

Cassienda sat on the sofa by herself, nodding happily and

for the most part silently all about the salon. Her soul was at peace. She turned from group to group with softly shining eyes, and felt herself deliciously in the midst of friends.

The Voeuf stood explaining in a very loquacious way to Monsieur Bernard some of the marks by which you may generally know the true from the spurious in the realm of *objets d'art*. Monsieur, however, said very little this evening. He seemed ominously preoccupied. . . .

In the center of his favourite fluff rug with its orange lining sat Kenneth, Turk-fashion. He was ordered away to his books by Mr. Bromley just as Madame, put into a talkative mood by Mrs. Brathers, was beginning a most absorbing account of how she was once operated upon for some organic difficulty, and how three times the surgeon was so careless as to sew up articles such as shears, towels and sponges inside her, having subsequently to go back after them. It was a very realistic account, though told in a loudly humorous style which seemed to discount any actual pain in connection with the experience, and even seemed to make being vivisected one of the most delightful events in life. The tale was told in a persistent third person, a construction very commonly employed by Madame when in one of her affable conversational moods.

At nine o'clock Mrs. Brathers said her *bon soir* and went out. Bromley looked at his watch almost constantly after that, and, when he thought a decent interval had elapsed, he, too, went out, striding off down the corridor towards the scene of rendezvous stealthily and with a pounding heart. He was irregularly followed by the others, the last being Jacques, who flung into the widow's sanctum listlessly after Miss Curtis, and was, throughout his stay, palpably bored. It had seemed rather daring to invite Monsieur Jacques, when Madame was to know nothing about the party. But Mrs. Brathers was so sure that he was in love with Miss Curtis, and had such high hopes of being able herself to conduct their destinies to the altar, that she decided to risk it. Making matches was her magnum opus.

It was a thoroughly charming party, though by no means

a devilish one—an affair in every way worthy of the delightful hostess. The little company at first indulged in Bridge, the amazing adroitness of Cassiendra carrying everything before it. Later on Miss Curtis suggested a new kind of artist-guessing game, which didn't, however, take very well.

To the longing eyes of the Voëuf the hostess looked more adorable than ever. Oh to plumb the secrets of the jealous future! To read, maybe in some mystic patterning of stars, whether there would be an ultimate merging of these two destinies! To seek out a fugitive oracle and put the universe-shaking question: won't she marry me if I *never* say die?

Mrs. Brathers was entertaining her guests with some gentle gossip. The Señorita sat happily beside her, holding one of the speaker's hands, and now and then patting it with fervid flutters of devotion. Mr. Bromley stood near by, his head falling to one side, as though over-weighty for so comparatively slim a neck. And he gazed solemnly upon the pretty picture: the widow he had cast away and the widow he wanted to capture. Miss Curtis listened to the rhythmic flow of scandal, but only in a half-hearted way, because her thoughts were, as usual, pursuing their own abstractions. Jacques yawned. His eye languidly explored the grand-looking brass bed which belonged to the emancipated wanderer.

It was Jacques' ear which first caught the rising note of broil from another wing of the house. He smiled. Mr. Bromley next pricked up his great ears, and looked quite startled and alarmed—as though he felt some sort of danger might be approaching Mrs. Brathers. And then Mrs. Brathers herself paused. Gossip died upon the thin lips which had been so devotedly purring it. The supreme point of interest leapt at once from tongue to ear. Once conscious of the far off note, Mrs. Brathers listened more acutely than anyone else.

"What ever is it?" she whispered.

"*Rien, je vous assure,*" replied Jacques. "It's only *ma mère* and *mon père*. Nothing, I assure you!"

"But are they speaking *angrily* to each other?" persisted the excited hostess.

"I'm afraid—a little. *Mon père* has a grievance, and *ma*

mère is meeting him half way. My friends, I assure you there's nothing to be alarmed about—*du tout!*"

It seems that the particular grievance in this case was of two days' standing. On Wednesday there had been a slightly short supply of potatoes cooked Monsieur's favourite way (in deep fat). No one knew better than Madame the amount required. Next to her, no one knew better than the cook. If the plate contained an abbreviated amount of this delectable vegetable, and Madame failed to raise a rumpus about it, there could be but one explanation. *Madame must have issued instructions.* For two days the injury had been nursed, with other minor injuries added in the meantime. Monsieur was at length thoroughly aroused.

"It is insulting!" he roared.

And she flew back at him with a sharp "*Slamatégai!*"

"We don't live like other people!"

"Whose fault is it?"

"I can stand the thin wine—half water. I can get along with one *petit pain* for breakfast. But I will *not* permit you, Madame, to cut down on my potatoes!"

"Will you tell me what other woman of my station would take in pensionnaires? No, you cannot!"

The motif rose. It grew and waved till, like a tree set in a tulip jar, it burst the narrow confines of the salon and began inundating the rest of the house. The servants huddled in their close hall and trembled. Was there danger the belligerents might storm the kitchen? Eléonore began nervously muttering over her beads.

"Be calm, my friends," Jacques was saying in the improvised salon of Mrs. Brathers.

"Oh," cried the hostess, in her excitement slipping an arm through Mr. Bromley's, "I believe they are coming to blows!"

Jacques shrugged his shoulders and whistled.

The salon door had flown open. The half flight of stairs was creaking frightfully. They were coming toward the front of the house. The truth was that Monsieur, though still maintaining considerable vocal cannonading, had begun the

inevitable retreat. The ammunition was giving out. Madame, advancing ever, screamed with exhaustless fury. And in this sorry manner was the head of the house driven right into his tiny nook between the two closets. He stumbled over its threshold. The victorious pursuer paused at the border.

"I want you to get out of my house!" cried Madame, beating her fists together in a very terrible manner indeed. "I don't want to see you any more!"

"Yes, you may be sure I'm going!" he returned. "I've stood all I can. Please step aside, will you?"

Monsieur had on his hat and overcoat. His eyes protruded horribly. The door slammed, and Madame struck its panels several times with her fists, by way of driving home the collective fury of the past quarter of an hour.

"*C'est fini*," observed Jacques with a brief, satirical sigh.

"Oh-h-h!" cried Mrs. Brathers, in the manner of a child who has at length come to the bottom of a very generous helping of ice cream.

And then Madame began to whimper, in a frail and treble way. She was wonderfully feminine and meek all at once. Her fists no longer beat against the door. She went back to the salon, and through it to her own room, where she had a good cry. Then she dried her eyes, slipped into a pretty negligée, and fell to planning the menus for next week. Before extinguishing her lamp she even read through a synopsis of a new play she was going to see at the Théâtre Réjane.

Now that the excitement was all over, Mrs. Brathers, feeling once more the responsibility of hostess upon her, excused herself and retired behind a large Japanese screen. There ensued a muffled rattle of dishes. Mr. Bromley, who was discussing with Cassiendra certain details relative to the restoration of the invention, very soon began to fidget. At length he excused himself altogether from Cassiendra and anxiously poked his head behind the screen.

"Dear Mrs. Brathers, isn't there *something* I can do to help you?"

"Oh, Mr. Bromley, what do you think?" she cried in real distress. "Eléonore has forgotten the lemons!"

"Then I'll run right out to the kitchen after them."

"Oh, if you would!"

He was off, taking long, important strides.

The kitchen was dark. He ran against a table, plunged his hand into a great bowl of dough left to rise, and said "Shoot!"

Eléonore timidly opened the door, admitting a flood of illumination. "Monsieur—oh, monsieur!"

"Is that you, Eléonore?"

"Yes. Oh, monsieur. . . ."

Her poor heart pounded. But Mr. Bromley demanded in his most raspy, street-cars-of-Athens voice: "Do you realize you've forgotten Mrs. Brathers' lemons?"

"Ah, but monsieur—there are no lemons in the house!"

"Not a single one?"

"No, monsieur. *C'est bien dommage.*" ..

"I should think it is!" exclaimed Bromley with futile exasperation. He paused in some perplexity, then brightened. "Ah, of course!" He had forgotten Kenneth upstairs. How very fortunate! "Eléonore, you just run up and rap on his door. Tell him I want to see him at once."

"*Oui, monsieur.*"

She climbed heavily up the winding flight, while Mr. Bromley stood scraping the last of the dough off his fingers.

Behind her ample screen Mrs. Brathers was labouring excitedly with sandwiches and *pain d'épice*. She carried on a fragmentary conversation with her guests, as a prestidigitator does during his tricks. As for her guests, their entertainment was obviously dwindling.

"Oh, what can be keeping him so long?" thought Mrs. Brathers desperately. If the lemons failed, there would be absolutely no beverage. There wasn't anything to substitute unless she served some of the herb tonic.

"Well?" Bromley called anxiously up the stairs.

"But he isn't here," Eléonore called down.

"Are you sure? He may have fallen asleep over his books." (The picture was momentarily quite pathetic). "Push the door open, *mon enfant*."

She came down stairs shaking her head.

"For this he *shall* go back to St. Dunstan's," muttered Mr. Bromley—not so much, alas, because he wasn't diligently plodding over school exercises as because he couldn't be sent scurrying off into great Paris alone at night after lemons for Mrs. Brathers!

Bromley hurried to his room for his hat and coat. He went out himself to a shop in another street and purchased the lemons. He bought a dozen, wishing to be sure not to have an under supply.

On the way back Bromley began mildly chiding himself for Kenneth's wildness. Where, in all great Paris, was the boy to-night? Still, he had certainly tried—God knew! Kenneth was plainly incorrigible.

In the lower hall, under the flaring gas jet, Mr. Bromley paused. A terrible fear made him tremble. He turned to look at the singer's door.

"Could he? *Could* he?"

Bromley hesitated a moment, while Mrs. Brathers was almost decided to risk the herb tonic. The sandwiches were already going around. Responsibility and dread weighed down the heart of the Voeuf and made it very sad. He tiptoed to Cyprienne's door. Shivers of terror raced through his gaunt form. What if the door should suddenly burst open in his face? But he was alone. The hall was very silent.

Mr. Bromley clutched the bag of lemons with his long fingers. His face was solemn and scared. And then, suddenly, stooping down, he placed one ear against the keyhole. Far within he could hear someone speaking—a woman. She was speaking deliciously, and in the sustained manner of one who tells a story. A moment later he heard a low boyish laugh.

"Good God!" sighed Mr. Bromley, grasping the bag of lemons more tightly.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

BROMLEY GOES ARMED WITH A TALISMAN

THE wintry sun uprose over the city of Paris—not very high, to be sure, because, the season being what it was, and latitude considered, Phoebus preferred just skirt-ing the housetops. Albert Bromley's head, so crisp-looking and sheer and formidable with its crop of militant hair, lay sidewise on the pillow. The pale eyes were curtained by lids so wrinkled that they appeared several sizes too large. Yes, Mr. Bromley was getting on. The ample mouth stood gently ajar, and respiration employed this gateway, involving a soft purr of larynx. The morning was exactly like all the other mornings for weeks past: dreary, cold, and dull. Yet the brazen summons to rise sounded throughout the house as blithely as though it were rare springtime and rising one of the acknowledged delights.

Mr. Bromley, though not a heavy sleeper, often woke with a good deal of deliberation. The head began to turn to and fro. The breathing became abruptly inaudible. Twice or thrice the face was mildly convulsed, as though a fly were promenading across it. Slowly the wrinkled lids drew up. The pale orbs gazed at the ceiling blankly for a time. Consciousness adjusted itself with what seemed an almost timid reluctance to the vast complexity of waking life. The brain, which contained such a multiplicity of interests, suffered itself, like a skiff drifting idly upon a summer current, to dally a little with the lingering inertia of slumber. Indeed, so still was the place when the bell had completed its harsh command that Mr. Bromley was even slipping back for a short final snooze, when on the door there fell a hesitating tap. He lay a moment with that delicious, guilty, sleepy

disregard which, at such times as this, is so very prone to await the second challenge. There was no second tap, however, but instead a low and husky voice announced with almost tremulous feeling: "*Monsieur, on a sonné . . .*"

Bromley closed his eyes and opened them again wearily. "Yes, *mon enfant*, I heard."

There was a sigh on the other side of the door, and the feet which belonged to the same organism which had emitted the sigh began reluctantly shuffling down the little hall. Suddenly Mr. Bromley roused himself sufficiently to call out: "Eléonore, Eléonore!"

The steps were eagerly reversed. She came back and opened the door. "*Oui, monsieur?*" But she did not stand there waiting for a summons to enter—which might never materialize. Instead she came in quite briskly, crossed the room, and lowered the window. She could not understand why her first American gentleman should sleep with his window open at night. It seemed upsetting her simple universe. Yet since he chose to sleep that way, it must be the thing to do.

"Eléonore," said he, "I'm too tired to get up for breakfast."

"Then I will bring it right in to monsieur on a tray," she replied, her eyes lighting. He lay there blinking solemnly up at her. When they spoke their breaths steamed on the damp air. "Shall I touch a light?" she enquired, indicating the tiny fireplace.

"Yes, do," he answered.

So she removed the iron shield and lighted the fire. Soon the little black nuggets were snapping away merrily, the sight appearing immediately to warm the wasted heart of the man of epochs as he lay in bed striving to summon enough courage to face the trials which each new day now seemed destined to bring him. When Eléonore had gone after his breakfast Mr. Bromley continued luxuriously to lie on his side, one broad high shoulder rising above his head like a cliff. He snuggled his chin a little more under the covers and lay blinking contentedly. And then, alas, he began thinking again.

First, of course, he thought about Mrs. Brathers, and began planning how he could work in another proposal. And then, somehow, his thoughts strayed far off to Athens, and he was bounding along in one of the admirable street cars. He fell to wondering whether they really had completed the new line, or whether it still was only being agitated. "I must study up on the verbs," he told himself. Then darker musings came, to fill his thoughts with nearer and grimmer responsibilities. Mr. Bromley prided himself upon his conscience, and just now to tell the truth, his conscience was rather violently perturbed. He might—and not, perhaps, without a strong suspicion of reason—argue that he had done all that any one humanly could to prevent this intimacy of Kenneth's with the singer downstairs. He had pleaded, he had threatened. He had even agreed that Kenneth might smoke cigarettes. What more could he do? What more could any one do? Ah, what a contrast between the son and the deceased parent! Tom was always so sensible and aloof. Yet see how Kenneth carried on!

"First he almost spoils my whole life through his confounded dealings with Cassienda," thought the Voef, "and now. . . ."

The good, beset man shivered. It was all right to threaten to send Kenneth back to St. Dunstan's. One could be ever so glib and impressive about it. Yet he knew that at St. Dunstan's they wouldn't take him back. He was too much for them. Bromley was forced to smile a little. Paris, then, seemed the only place that would tolerate Tom Bayard's son! What a shock this would be for poor Tom, who was always the soul of quiet, unobtrusive living. It was a fortunate thing Tom wasn't alive.

"Well," the wild boy's guardian concluded, "there's only one remedy. Leave Paris." Yet how could he bring himself to so extreme a move? No, he couldn't go away. But what to do, then? What, indeed?

And now here was this latest burden, involving the invention, and which he dared not disregard for fear of horrid

consequences. Possibly the quest would even prove dangerous! His life perhaps . . . Oh, this was a fine proposition, indeed, for him to have been got into!

Mr. Bromley's unhappy cogitation on this last phase of his accumulating embarrassments was broken rather coincidentally, in a way. There was a tapping again, but this time at the door between his room and the Señorita's.

"Albert, Albert!" she cried softly. "Are you awake?"

"Yes, yes. What is it, Cassienda?"

"I—I am so anxious about my poor brother's invention." There was an awkward silence.

"Could you manage it today, Albert?"

Mr. Bromley was about to advise her that he must be permitted to consult his own convenience entirely in the matter when it occurred to him that after all one day was as good as another, and that the sooner it was over and the obligation placed between them the better it would be for his peace of mind. So he replied that he might perhaps be able to arrange it.

"You will make him give it up at once?"

"I'll do what I can."

"And will you bring it right back with you, Albert?"

Mr. Bromley ignored any discussion of delivery, but asked her whether she had her late brother's will in readiness, in case it should be required. Yes, she had it. She even held it up with a flourish on her side of the wall.

"All right, all right," he ended, making a gesture in the air which was quite as superfluous. "I'll see you in an hour and arrange the details."

Then Eléonore returned with his chocolate and three of the precious little breakfast rolls—a prodigality causing him a genuine start.

"Why, *mon cher enfant*, what does this mean?" he demanded, with as great a degree of seriousness as though it might have some significance for the nation.

"*Oui, monsieur*," she replied, lowering her eyes. "I slipped the other two on when Madame was not looking!"

At about two o'clock that afternoon Mr. Bromley set out. He was very serious of mien, but otherwise presented the appearance merely of smart and blithe prosperity. He wore a short overcoat with soft fur collar, and belted in a very juvenile fashion. His derby was of an up-to-date English mould, and he wore pearl grey gaiters to protect his ankles from the penetrating winds. At the last moment Mrs. Brathers inserted a blossom in the lapel of his coat—a blossom which she had tenderly culled from her own little window garden. It had grown on one of those very plants Mr. Bromley had himself assisted her to purchase that first morning at the *marché*. What points of unity one's destiny possessed! She said, furthermore, that it would bring him good luck. As she was placing the flower in his buttonhole, Mr. Bromley set this down as one of the supremest moments of a long and vicissitudinous life.

At the head of the stairs the two widows stood, affectionately intertwined, and waved their handkerchiefs. He might have been another Launfal or some great Tassovian prince setting out on a chivalrous pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

"I hope, sir," said Kenneth as they walked toward the Boulevard Saint Germain, where a taxi was to be procured, "you've not forgotten your cheque book."

"Cheque book?"

"After all, it might be easiest that way."

"For heaven's sake, Kenneth, speak more plainly. I haven't comprehended a thing since we left the house."

But Kenneth knew perfectly what he was about. It was the beginning of a campaign to secure a second alimony for Cassienda. "I just thought," he enlarged, "it might pay to have your cheque book handy where you could get at it if you should just happen to want to."

"H'm!" muttered the Voëuf darkly.

"Of course you won't have to, you know."

"Won't have to what?"

"Really buy it. At least," he cryptically added, "I don't

believe you'll have to. Or rather," which was most cryptic of all, "not for such a very great deal."

"No, I trust not," the other answered dryly. "That would be scarcely in the contract."

"But it would get you inside, don't you see? It might not be necessary to go on with it once you got inside. All the same, if I were you I wouldn't haggle too much. One can only carry Mrs. Brathers' market methods so far, after all. And besides, you see, as a lawyer you mightn't frighten him enough."

Mr. Bromley climbed into his taxi, waved a hurried and very much preoccupied adieu, and was off. Then, all at once, Kenneth conceived a whole new plan of procedure. He tore madly off, bolting through alleys and down side streets, taking the shortest cut possible to rue Racine. Once arrived, he negotiated the steps three at a time, and stood panting before Sterrett's door.

"He's on his way!" cried Kenneth as soon as the door opened. "He'll be here right off. May I hide?"

"Of course," answered Sterrett. "Enter, Jim Hawkins. But I'm afraid there are no convenient apple barrels."

Kenneth had another inspiration right on the spot. "Why not in the invention?" he shouted.

"Why not, indeed? If you can manage."

"I'm sure I can."

They repaired to the room with the big fireplace, where the octagonal box reposed.

"I guess it will be a tight squeeze," observed Sterrett, eyeing the invention critically.

"You leave that to me! How do you open the thing?"

"Got me! I've never pried into it. I don't know what it's for, exactly, or what it's made of. There may not be any inside. The thing's heavy enough to be solid. It cost enough to cart up from Paris!"

Kenneth was feverishly whacking the box and feeling around for a lid. There was one!

"Look here!" he cried. "The whole top comes off."

They removed a few of the slats at the top, which worked on concealed hinges, and peered inside. One perceived quite a mass of mechanism, but Kenneth wouldn't be daunted.

"Give me a lift, please! That's right."

There came a ring at the door.

"It's Bromley!" The boy crawled in somewhat hysterically. "Now put the lid back on. Yes, I can breath. There are some slits in one side."

His voice was muffled but incorrigibly buoyant.



CHAPTER THIRTY

THE STREET CARS OF ATHENS

IT was most extraordinary!

Of course, being inside the invention, Kenneth could not hear any of the opening remarks at the door. But by the time his friend the erstwhile enemy and Mr. Bromley had reached the room where the invention so innocently stood, it was very evident that Sterrett had somehow steered a smooth course. He had made everything absurdly easy for the Voef, behaving toward him as though this visit were the most ordinary, everyday kind of visit imaginable. So adroitly had he managed, in fact, that by the time they had sat down together and one would think Mr. Bromley could not decently delay any longer getting straight to brass tacks, lo! they were miles deep in the pleasantest sort of talk about just the things Bromley liked best: *objets d'art*, pictures, travel. Ah, especially travel. And before one could even catch one's breath, they had reached Greece. They were in Athens! They were riding in the street cars of Athens! And then—it was like a page of fairy tale!—Sterrett confided to Bromley the astonishing fact that he owned stock—quite a fair block of it—in the company that ran those very street cars!

And then there was nothing to it. Bromley was wild. Simply *wild*. He forgot all about what he had come for—talked excitedly on and on, in his enthusiasm pacing up and down, asking eager questions, delivering eager discourses. Once he paused and actually leaned against the very invention itself. He thumped it smartly with the palm of his hand by way of emphasizing something he was saying. It seemed to Mr. Bromley the most wonderful thing in the world, almost, to own stock in the street cars of Athens.

Yes, it was certainly amazing! There stood Mr. Bromley leaning up against the invention—Bromley in all his immaculate grandeur, quite drolly exquisite in his perfection of dress and gentility, the hopeful talisman in his buttonhole giving a debonair dash that rebuked the painful solemnity of his great, anxious, yet now so excited face. And there sat Mr. Sterrett, ruggedly composed, almost humorously big and rough and masculine. And inside the Señorita's invention, cramped and half suffocated, yet eternally blithe, crouched Kenneth. It was quite perfect. Comedy played a high half hour.

And then they were standing up—not Kenneth, of course, because Kenneth couldn't even raise his little finger—and Sterrett was shaking Bromley warmly by the hand and walking out to the door with him. And then, in a kind of whirl and exaltation, Bromley had taken his departure! He was gone, and the mission on which he had called—the secret mission of Cassiendra's—had been utterly overlooked. All the misgivings beforehand had been in vain, all the tremors needless—even the hopeful talisman had failed to exert its potent influence. The invention had been clean forgot.

Kenneth came joyously out of the great box. It had been wonderful—and the invention still safe in their grasp! All sorts of doubts and fears had played tag in his brain while he crouched inside, waiting. He had been fully prepared to have Sterrett just stupidly hand the thing right over, without a word. Good night to Señorita's second alimony! Good night to any further commercialization of the affair for any of them! He had been almost prepared to have his new accomplice give him away along with the invention. But no. The accomplice had done none of these things. He thought Sterrett had been enormously clever, but Sterrett laughed in his large, full-chested way, which made all one's exploits seem suddenly trivial, and said he hadn't been clever at all, but had, himself, forgotten for the time being the real purpose behind Bromley's visit.

"You mean to tell me it wasn't all a trick?"

"Of course not. What trick would it be? You forget I'd not been fully instructed beforehand."

"We'd agreed not to let the invention get away without a struggle."

"Yes, so we had. We'd agreed to suggest, in some polite way, that the Señorita's alimony was all gone. By the way," he asked, in an almost awed manner, "what will she do to him when he arrives home without it?"

"Oh, nothing much," drawled Kenneth delightedly. "She won't do a thing but go to Mrs. Brathers with the whole story!"

"But what will happen then?"

"Then? Oh, nothing much, only Bromley will have to wave good-bye to his Epoch."

"What the devil do you mean by—? Oh, yes—his Epoch. Yes, I remember. I begin to see. It's terribly deep, isn't it? I've never bumped up against anything quite so deep as you people who live in Maison Bernard!" And then he quickly added: "But look here, this won't do. We can't let Bromley come here like this and go away again without even mentioning the elephant. Don't you see? It's really almost tragic. I'm sure you're a great deal too hard on Mr. Bromley. He strikes me as not at all a bad sort of chap."

"But he isn't your guardian," argued Kenneth stubbornly. "You've no idea what a difference it makes if he's your guardian!"

"I suppose there's something in what you say," Sterrett generously agreed. "But you say yourself he's most difficult when he's out of an epoch, and here you are, crazy to rob him of a perfectly good one. Besides, there's the Señorita. I feel like a cad to have kept the thing here an hour after I learned where she was."

"It's not many hours as it is," Kenneth reminded him.

And this was vaguely comforting. There had seemed no real harm in letting Mr. Bromley call; he would get the credit of its return that way, and, as Kenneth painted the picture, he really needed all the credit of that sort he could lay hold

of. Yes, Bromley stood to gain by it, even if they *should* be able on top of everything to swing a moderate second alimony. "But now you see what we've done," he said. "By George, the more I think about it the worse it gets!"

"But you shouldn't think," advised Kenneth. "It doesn't pay—honestly it doesn't. That's what Bromley does. He sits and thinks and thinks about all his troubles, till they get ten times worse than they were before he began thinking."

"Yes, but whatever we do, we must play fair, mustn't we, old man?"

"Yes, admitted Kenneth a little grudgingly, "I suppose we must do that. And of course," he remembered, "at this rate we'd never swing that other alimony for Señorita. I think you could have gotten him to offer a very decent price. He would even have preferred that, because then it wouldn't be necessary to show how much law he'd forgotten since the swindle. After all, why *did* you get him on to the street cars of Athens? That's the one subject he can't resist."

"Then quick! Let's head him off," replied Sterrett. "It can't be too late. Out you go, and grab the first taxi. We'll deliver the goods ourselves!"

"But without making him pay anything at all?"

"Well," conceded Sterrett, "we can discuss details on the way. At worst," he smiled, "we could manage something C. O. D., I suppose. Out you go, while I tie some ropes around this box and make it ready for its little jaunt. Then I'm through with it. I wash my hands. I leave it to you deep folks in Maison Bernard. Inventions aren't quite in my line either, although," he added with a rough boyish drawl, "there's really almost nothing that hasn't somehow been in my line, at one time or another."

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

THREE IN A SEAT

MR. BROMLEY rode back to rue Jacob, his mind still greatly excited over the pleasurable vistas opened up by Sterrett. It was not until his taxi actually turned the corner out of rue Bonaparte that the awful recognition of his failure swept upon him. But these were violent days. These were days so full of happenings that the customary leisure for the registering of pain-and-pleasure facts was largely withheld. So now, as his vehicle drew up at the gate, a most delectable apparition appeared. He started, and his pale eyes grew moist with eagerness and welcome. It was Mrs. Brathers, all cloaked and muffed and gloved and veiled and chapeaued. Her eyes were quite sparkling. When Bromley's taxi drew to a stop at the curb, she began speaking at once.

"I've just had a telephone call from my *dear* friend Annetta Davies, whom I haven't seen since I was at Lugano! She's just come up to Paris from the Lake country, and is entertaining a few friends at tea at the Grosvenor. Annetta wants us both, and I—I told her we'd come."

The Voëuf looked more solemn and excited than ever, and he asked about the hour.

"Oh, if we could start at once," pursued Mrs. Brathers, eyeing the waiting taxi, "we should arrive in time."

"Well, we can, we can," replied Bromley with great earnestness.

"Of course, I wouldn't disturb any of your plans for worlds. But," she hastily added, "if you're *sure* it's all right...."

And without further questioning she climbed quickly inside. Bromley, who had alighted, assisted her gallantly, according

to his wont. And then he climbed in after her, slammed the door, and was in a small paradise on wheels.

Mrs. Brathers fluttered with gaiety and anticipation. She chatted steadily as they rode along together over the river toward rue Pierre-Charron.

"I enjoy *nothing* so much as going places where one can meet one's friends, and make new ones, and talk with interesting people!" Bromley agreed to this with owl-like noddings. Then she told him more about the Miss Davies by whom they were to be entertained. "She's one of the most charming human beings I ever encountered! There's no phase of society she hasn't experienced—no nice phase, that is, of course." The widow lowered her eyes at the guilty reference, and then continued: "Annetta has read everything, seen everything, and lived everything—without getting the least blasé. It's really very remarkable. A few years ago she needed a little extra money, and translated some Italian romances into English, Spanish, and French. They were quite heavenly! Sometimes I'm a little frightened at her learning. We used to speak French together entirely, all the while I was at Lugano. Her French is the most elegant I have ever heard—even amongst French people! Yet dear Annetta was born in Harrisburg. She used to visit me sometimes at Scranton. I know you'll think her utterly charming." The Voeuf, however, was slightly qualified at this point in his nodding, because how could any woman seem utterly charming when the widow of Timothy Brathers was in the same room with her? "We didn't mingle much with the people in the hotel at Lugano," she continued. "There were no people there who interested us—mostly tourists and vulgar people, you know. So we roamed the hills and sat beside the lakes, and took tea everywhere within a radius of many miles. Ah," she sighed, "I'm so *glad* dear Annetta has come up to Paris!"

But already Mr. Bromley was jealous of this phenomenal creature. Yes, downright jealous. And he wished instead that she had stayed where she was, in the Italian Lake region.

Meanwhile, another taxi containing a man and a boy and a big, mysterious box sped rapidly through the streets from rue Racine to rue Jacob. It drew up at the courtyard gate of Maison Bernard.

Sterrett glanced at the vacant face of the house. He fancied it had a kind of ominous look. "Let's hope we aren't too late!" he said.

They lifted the invention out onto the sidewalk, paid the driver, and started in with their burden. They bore it between them laboriously. The invention was of a most awkward size, and its octagonal edges had a nasty way of finding one's shins.

When they had traversed about half the distance to the house, the door opened and Cyprienne emerged. She stopped short at sight of so ludicrous a procession.

Kenneth was ahead. He spied her the moment she stepped out, and called shrilly to her, his voice, as it often did, breaking register.

"Look here!" he cried, "I've captured the robber and brought him home to be your slave!"

And then something wholly miraculous happened. At the same moment that a look came into the singer's face which he knew he never could forget, Kenneth felt the other end of the invention released. It banged down on the pavement.

And then he turned and saw Sterrett's face. And then, in a flash he knew that this was the mighty hunter. And then he remembered what the singer had said about lines crossing and crossing. And he remembered her words: "A charmed circle."

Scarcely less emphatic was Sterrett's surprise over Kenneth's apparent intimacy with his lady. The fact is, Cyprienne had not yet given Sterrett permission to visit her in her own home. She had chosen to be a little mysterious and evasive. They had selected many a rendezvous about town—first in the Tuileries gardens, then in various other convenient and delightful spots. And while he, of course, knew the approximate neighborhood of her residence, he had been in

such a confused, or, perhaps rather in such a highly specialized frame of mind the night they met and he rode home with her that he hadn't been able since to satisfy himself of the exact location. Not that it much mattered—as she had reminded him. His having found her was enough. But now, all at once, here she was coming right out of her own house.

"I seem," he smiled, "to have pried into your most secret retreat, Anna."

"Oh, well," she smiled back, "it's really no matter, Hugh, after all."

But when Kenneth heard her called Anna instead of Cyprienne, he began to feel just about as shaky and queer as Sterrett had felt when the meeting occurred behind the Opéra. And he knew instantly that this was no mistake, but that the singer's name really and truly *was* Anna. And just as swiftly he felt as though, with the falling of this brief alien word, the singer was somehow snatched away from him, and that henceforward some one else would stand first. And he realized very positively that he didn't like the arrangement. They had succeeded in getting around him. They had been playing a little game of which he had guessed nothing. It was particularly galling and offensive to his ego; for he had sailed on serene in the belief that he alone possessed the prerogative of playing games. It was a sad blow. He felt horribly let down and desperately lonely. He felt—and it was surely a delicious bit of irony that such should be the case—much as poor Bromley felt over the newly arrived Annetta Davies. There is a plain phrase which most aptly covers the situation: his accomplice had cut him out!

"Well," said Sterrett, "since I've tracked you at last, are you going to drive me away?"

"No," she replied, speaking with a warm and tender rush of emotion, "you're here now, Hugh, and—well, here we are *together*: that's all." She laughed lightly. "You're Kenneth's robber, I see. And I—"

"You're Kenneth's singer?"

"Yes. I'm Kenneth's singer. . . ."

She smiled at Kenneth, which brought him, he realized with a little grateful thrill, for a moment, after all, within the ecliptic of their vivid absorption in each other. Kenneth sat down wistfully on the invention.

And then she said that it would never do to stay where they were, in the centre of the court, with Kenneth sitting on top of that great box, drumming his heels against the side. And Sterrett said: "By George, you're right, and we were in such a hurry, as I now recollect, until you came along and made all the hurry in the world seem so very unimportant." And he told her: "This is the Señorita's invention. I suppose you've heard?"

"Her poor brother's," Kenneth reminded him.

"Oh, yes," she smiled, "I've heard all about it."

"And who knows," he went on almost ruefully, "if Mr. Bromley's Epoch isn't already smashed?"

"No," said the singer, "it's still quite safe, for I saw them drive off together not a quarter of an hour ago."

"Well, then," said Sterrett, "we may as well carry the thing up to Señorita. Though I suppose," he added, humorously perplexed, "Mr. Bromley had somehow counted on doing that himself."

"Yes," Kenneth assured them, feeling more at ease now the tenseness of the new situation was beginning to relax, "it's sure to upset some of his calculations. It doesn't take much. And besides, there's the second alimony to be considered."

"Well," laughed Cyprienne, "all this, of course is terribly deep. But wouldn't it perhaps be as well to carry the box into my house and decide later what to do with it?"

They thought her plan a very good one. So the invention, which had caused so much trouble and brought such strange things to pass, was again hoisted up and carried into the singer's house. And then the singer said she simply must be off to a rehearsal—she was already late. But they might both ride along, if they liked. And so they did. Sterrett

bestowed on Kenneth a queer, mixed look. And Kenneth, though he fathomed the look well enough, wouldn't be done out of his ride. Hadn't he, after all, some claim on the singer himself? Starrett needn't crowd, even if he was the mighty hunter.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

EN FAMILLE

WHEN it was just night in the city, two vehicles, the first a low carriage and the second a yellow taxi, arrived at the gate of Maison Bernard. In the first were Cyprienne, Kenneth, and Sterrett. Kenneth sprang out and gave the singer his hand. He gloried in the supremeness of what he considered exclusively his moment. Then the two went swiftly across the dark court, while the other occupant, waving goodbye, and straining for a last look, permitted himself to be driven off in the direction of rue Racine. Mr. Bromley, with an excess of gallantry, all but lifted Mrs. Brathers bodily out of the taxi and on to the sidewalk. However, even this normally absorbing occupation failed to occupy the entire attention of the Voëuf, for he kept turning and peering over a military shoulder. Mrs. Brathers, though still full of the buoyant influence of Miss Davies, noticed this anxiety on her companion's part, and even caught a parting glimpse of its inspiration.

"Oh, he's with that singer again!" she cried; and neither the announcement itself nor the tone in which it was delivered went a very great way toward mitigating the other's sense of impending doom. "Oh, what a wicked, wicked woman she must be! It almost tempts one to question the efficacy of one's religion, doesn't it? To think there should be so much wickedness in the world! And who was that strange man who stayed in the carriage?"

"Oh, I don't know what to do with him!" Bromley confessed with the utmost mournfulness as they entered the house and began the ascent. He ignored her last question. Kenneth was burden enough without speculating about any mysterious strangers. The man's presence, however, hadn't escaped him.

"I'm afraid Kenneth's sowing his—his wild oats!" sighed Mrs. Brathers complacently. There was manifest though guarded delight here. It is to be feared that in secret Mrs. Brathers a little gloated over the ways of young men. Yes, it is to be strongly suspected that she doted on wild oats and would willingly abet any youthful intrigue, however extravagant—so long, that is, one credited her with much righteous indignation and respected the severe façade of virtuous correctness behind which she would have one picture her always seated, with devoutly folded hands. . . .

Once in his own room alone, Albert Bromley began most desperate debate with himself concerning what was to be done about Kenneth. So great, at length, was his alarm that it entirely overshadowed, for the time being, his feeling that something dire would be the outcome of his having failed to bring home the invention. Where were all his elaborate theories now? Vanished. Just simply vanished. Smashed to nothing at all. This was one of the typical Bromley collapses. As he looked back it seemed to him that his life was full of them.

The conclusion that he must have another—a really crucial—session with Kenneth prompted a seizing of the signal bell. He opened the door and extended one of his long arms into the hall. However, at the first stroke an entirely different campaign occurred to him, and instead he merely rang for hot water.

"The worst," he told himself dismally, "may as well be faced at once. Words are wasted on him. He's too much for me. Just as he's been too much for everybody. After all, that's a little of Tom. For all Tom's splendid qualities, you could never persuade him contrary to his way of thinking—not in a hundred years. No, there's no use talking to Kenneth. *I must go to her!*"

After dinner the Voëuf excused himself rather mysteriously from the salon and stole, with a queer mingling of stealthiness

and severity and thumping heart, down the flights to the singer's apartment. These extreme emotions, he felt, were not good for his heart—his heart which was interestingly not strong.

However, on this occasion he had all his pains and his quakings for naught. A servant advised him that Mademoiselle was at the Opéra, and wouldn't return until late. So he climbed back to Maison Bernard, quite as tremendously relieved as though the whole business had been successfully concluded, and reëntered the salon as mysteriously as he had quitted it.

Mrs. Brathers was charmingly immersed in the Curtis-Jacques prospects. One of the young persons was seated on either side of her, Miss Curtis looking very serious and disembodied, and M. Jacques winking occasionally over at Kenneth when Mrs. Brathers' attention was directed upon the individual she had selected as his mate.

Mrs. Brathers was engrossed in her task of sounding amatory possibilities, the task of tracing, along with blushes real or fancied, the palpitations of young hearts. Perhaps the most striking trait of her whole personality was the ardent insistence upon a diet of reflected emotion. It was this which had ultimately always to content her. The ghost of the dear departed encountered, in full battle array, the onsets of her own intrepid lovers; and while at most times she was satisfied to sit, like Helen of Troy, watching the flux of fortunes in a battle so fiercely waged for her sake, still it was with keen, childlike relish that she would sometimes slip away from the turmoil-encompassed seat to divert herself among youth. Youth, far removed from that grim field where swords clashed; youth, not yet saddened or subdued by life's buffets. Youth, tuned so exquisitely to the throbbing lute of love, sporting in flower-strewn, innocent meadows, yet being sweetly conscious, all through the pretty play, of a radiant Hymeneal altar, where mated souls attained life's richest blessing.

There was honestly no reason why Miss Curtis and Jacques

Bernard should be thought of as a matrimonial possibility. The most casual sort of acquaintance with them would serve to convince any normally adjusted intelligence that such a combination must be out of the question. But that was Mrs. Brathers' great charm: she *wasn't* normally adjusted. To Mrs. Brathers, as has hitherto been intimated, love was love. It was a sort of staple that came by the ounce or the bushel. A man was a man, a woman a woman. Somehow, by hook or by crook, almost any available woman ought to be brought to the altar alongside of almost any available man. Yes, aside from her own amatory interests Mrs. Brathers had no real business in life other than conniving toward the matrimony of others.

In the midst of the great, hurrying, terrible, mirthful, tragic world of humanity Mrs. Brathers moved—and such was the business of her life. Potentates, diplomats, *stâtesmen* were busy insinuating the destiny of the nations. Czars of finance were multiplying their millions and jeopardizing the assets of all the lesser czars. Important issues of a thousand sorts were met every day in all the cities and countrysides. The duty of directing the courses of great ships at sea occupied the alert attention of captains and officers. Trained engineers in their overalls and visored caps manipulated the throttles of locomotives, hauling millions of merchandise and millions of souls. In the city of New York there was an army of men at work day and night trying to get up the steel frame of the latest skyscraper on schedule time. In Tōkyō the night schools were cram full of energetic, clever young men, bending to the task of learning the language of foreigners they desired to meet in a commercial way. Fishermen in seacoast towns far and near laboured with nets for the purpose of supplying markets and sustaining human life. Farmers, husky and hardened to their profession, drudged in every clime, toiling to supply other markets and sustain more human life. Miners were probing the bowels of the earth. Speculators were drilling for oil. Glass blowers were blowing glass. Girls in factories were trimming hats. Composers were set-

ting down the scores of new operas and grasping the inspiration of new symphonies. Actors were making up in their dressing rooms, while scene shifters set the stage and the curtain rose. Up in the clouds, lonely and aloof, flew the airmen. Psychics were putting in eighteen hours a day communing with the dead. A great scientist was bestowing the finishing touches upon his daring theory of bent rays. Wherever there is civilized life on our terrestrial ball, there you might find men and women grieving over mighty losses, rejoicing in soul-stirring gains. You would find men helping up a fallen brother, women making the colossal sacrifices of motherhood. The great world was brim full of constructive, destructive, manly and womanly, seraphic and satanic activities, gripping sorrows, heroic consecrations, hideous crimes, supreme loves. There were enormous naked forces ceaselessly contending from pole to pole. The stars in their courses flashed steadily, thrilling with purpose. Space, multiplying wonders, stretched away beyond the ken of any calculation. And in the centre of it all was the widow of Timothy Brathers, whose business was making matches.

Kenneth and Cassienda flanked Madame Bernard, forming another group. Madame, a very sly look in her eyes, was flourishing one of those huge black-bordered missives which, in France, announce the demise of any one sufficiently important or opulent to warrant the expense.

"It is M. Froc who is dead," she was saying, "and my husband has departed for Dijon to attend the funeral."

And then, as though to lend dignity and substance to this announcement, Madame adjusted her gold nippers and read the document through from beginning to end: from the initial "*Vous êtes prier d'assister aux Service, et Enterrement,*" ending with the designation of cemetery, and including a catalogue of the relatives one might expect to encounter at the church. Also, midway, there was a mighty *De Profundis*, which Madame pronounced with great solemnity, glancing up over her golden rims to observe whether her audience was sufficiently impressed. And yet everyone knew that M. Ber-

nard *hadn't* gone to attend any funeral at Dijon. As it chanced, there had really been a M. Froc who died; it was a perfectly genuine epistle from which the crafty lady read—the fact, alone, that it bore a date four years previous going uncommunicated.

Mr. Bromley naturally at once affiliated himself with the former group, and Mrs. Brathers turned on him a flushed and brilliant look, saying she had just been advising Miss Curtis and M. Jacques to go and see *L'Enfant de l'Amour* together; and she mentioned the Boulevard theatre where this exciting piece was current.

The Voëuf looked around the salon circle and sighed peacefully. It was a quiet, happy evening at home. For a few hours at least he might give himself over unreservedly to comfortable, heart-warming social intercourse. The chatter of voices was pleasant and amicable. Madame was fabricating ferociously, but it was to protect the status of her house—an evil which every normal member of society agrees must be indulged in now and then to prevent friction. Mrs. Brathers was exerting every influence toward stirring up an emotion in two hearts which could hardly result in anything short of suicidal unhappiness, were it actually to develop. Yes, it was a peaceful and altogether cheering *soirée en famille*. Tomorrow the singer would have to be faced. Ah, and tomorrow there was the invention to be sought again. Tomorrow, all in all, promised to be a not supremely enjoyable day. But tonight the whole world seemed still and full of an encompassing friendliness. It was like a beautiful, quiet canvas by Fragonard. Or it resembled the gladsomeness of Nicholas Lancret's *Printemps*.

Cassienda kept glancing uneasily over toward Bromley and Mrs. Brathers. There was a kind of faint kindling glitter in her eyes. She munched snappingly on a white turnip, drawing that vulgar vegetable out of a daintily wrought little silk bag only now and then, and slipping it coyly back again at once. She gnawed with relish but impeccable elegance.

Lo, Kenneth, sitting Turk-fashion on his gay fluff rug. How



EN FAMILLE

215

innocently he gazes up at Madame as she drones through the list of bereaved relations! And at the Señorita, and at dear Bromley, and at Mrs. Brathers. Kenneth resembled some blooming, seraphic little boy with sprouting wings such as you will find in the foreground of many a famous piece of Renaissance art. As he thus sat, drinking in a colossal foreign wickedness, he appeared the very sublimated essence in miniature of this most enjoyable, quiet, harmless, though perhaps just faintly ominous evening en famille. . . .

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

A DESTINY ALL UPSIDE DOWN

AND all while, downstairs, another quiet evening was in progress. For as a matter of fact, Cyprienne was not at the Opéra at all. The servant who gave the information to Mr. Bromley was very badly mistaken indeed, for Cyprienne was right in the big room with the pool all the time. And there was somebody else there too, the whole of the evening. It was the mighty hunter, all slumped down comfortably in one of the large chairs before the fire, while she sat nearby in a low chair, her head thrown lightly back. She looked beautiful and dreamy, and she wore a simple white shimmery gown, with some pearls at her throat.

Sterrett was smoking his pipe. He looked at her meditatively with half closed eyes. It was almost a domestic scene. The evening was long and snug.

He gazed about him, taking in the fine lines of the white marble fireplace, the admirable values of the perspective which stretched to embrace the music room without in any way crowding the pool, the utter and charming uniqueness of the whole. The tapestries, with the glow of the lamps upon them, were wonderfully rich. The firelight crept along the surface of the water, intensifying its mysterious quiet, yet relieving it of any appearance of coldness or intrusion. The pool belonged there. It was essential. The place would be incomplete without it. Yet who but Anna would ever have thought of such a thing? Yes, as he pondered it more and more, the place was peculiarly and quite thrillingly hers.

Sterrett was delighted. Yet he did not talk about her house. Instead he talked about her, and above all he gazed upon her. She had grown more beautiful, he felt, without sacrificing any of that baffling quality which had always, in

the old days, filled him with a nameless sweet despair. It had seemed to him then that he never could possess her. And now, with their relationship so altered, he felt the thing more strongly than ever. She induced in him a tendency toward shyness. And he found himself gropingly juggling with the query of a modern poet, who, through the lips of a child, addresses a starfish:

*"With my fingers in the dark
I can feel your thorny spark:
By its light, how far—how far
Is a starfish from a star?"*

And that was it—he was, at best, only a kind of starfish. . . .

"It seems almost unbelievable, doesn't it?—how we found each other," she said. "And yet, quite as unbelievable are the narrow escapes, when it would seem we really couldn't help it!"

"What narrow escapes?" he asked.

"Oh," she replied a little dreamily, "we came so near—we were so 'warm,' as the children say in their games. You remember that little card on which you drew a map for Kenneth the day you and he first met, in the 'bus?"

"For his progressive luncheon—oh, yes."

"Well, I held it right in my hand for ever so long, while he showed me where the lines went and he told me what he had to eat at each stopping place. And if I had turned the card over. . . . But I didn't. And a little bit later we drew up at the curb right before your house. There I sat, and inside the house—there *you* sat. And I drove away." She sighed. "Isn't it funny?"

But Sterrett, on his side, he now discovered, had thrown away chances. "If I had gone to the opera that night I should have seen you. It would have seemed destined indeed, wouldn't it? But no. Instead I get a toothache and beg off. And then, by the wildest chance, afterward—" He laughed softly. "Hardly deserved, I'd say."

Then he fell into another reverie, and was presently brought out of it by a question which broke the spell of breathlessness their magnetic silence had deepened. There were more mysterious facts to clear up. And what she wanted to know now was how he had ever managed to pick up the *Señorita* ("of all persons on earth!") and how he came to be in company with such an article as this outlandish invention.

"Well," he answered slowly, puffing on his pipe, "she's after all the sort I'd discover: unconventional, unique in a way, and with something to exploit. First it was the fortune-telling. I just happened to drop in to have my palm read. It had been a long time since any sibyl had pried into my past, present, and future, and I've always had a hunch that it ought to be indulged in every so often. There's that much of a mystic streak in me—the Irish, I suppose. She offered to go into a trance for a few francs more, but I took just an ordinary treatment. Then we got into a conversation, and we talked on and on till it was dark. And then I took her out to dinner, and after that she took me into the business. In a few weeks you never would have recognized her practice. It was entirely made over."

"But how on earth did you do it?"

"How? Advertising. Yes, indeed. Not so many inches in the newspapers—not exactly that sort. But advertising. There are subtle ways—no end of 'em. You see," he explained in a leisurely way, "what all my genius has narrowed down to is this: I go poking into odd corners, doing odd jobs. After my first little fortune was spent I had to give up hunting big game. It was tough, in a way. But lions and tigers don't bring in enough. I hung my gun up on a peg and went to work. One thing, then another—until finally I'm—well, you might call me a kind of roving tinker. It doesn't, as a rule, pay any very heavy dividends. Still, it somehow keeps me in bread and cheese. I do what I can to maintain the spark of domesticity by putting up shacks in my favourite nooks all over the world. It's a little costly; but it's humanizing."

"Have you a great many of these shacks?" asked the singer.

"Oh, not so many. One here in Paris—one in Madrid—one in Egypt—" and he made a brief little shrugging gesture which implied that a complete inventory would require a good deal more concentration than he had then to bestow. It was, withal, a modest and effacing gesture; but it was one which, coupled with her meditative silence, seemed to promise that all these matters would be gone into thoroughly later on.

And then he told her more about his wanderings up and down the world. And she told him more of her far quieter life since their ways had sundered: how she had given up everything for her music, madly eager to lose herself completely in something; of her struggles and heartaches, of her subsequent success. New York—Vienna—Palermo—Paris. Well, she had done her little jaunting, too. Now it was Paris, mostly Paris.

And then, as the fire burned low, they talked again of the very distant past—of the days of their first meeting. Yes, it had been wonderful—that sleepy little port on the Dalmatian coast—the white villas dreaming above the blue water—the walks by sunlight and starlight. They had little guessed then what was in store! The winter in Vladivostok—when they had met again, quite miraculously, and had skated together on gray, wind-swept lakes—that was still more wonderful. It was then he had given her all the furs. She told him now how restless her husband had been—how he watched and spied upon her everywhere. And yet he no longer loved her. It was only his sense of outraged possession that bothered him. But she, herself, had been defiant and headstrong. Yes, she had been wilful and reckless. She had lost her sense of humour. . . .

"And then," she sighed, "that letter. . . !"

His eyes blinked in the smoke, and he nodded. "Yes—that letter. If I'd only gotten it!"

He had gone up into Russia—the interior—trapping. And one night, feeling particularly lonely and desperate she had written to him. . . . But he had never received it, that fatal

scrap of indiscretion. Her husband somehow came upon it, in the manner of jealous husbands the world over—especially in the good Victorian days. And that was all. Receiving no word from her, Hugh had hurried back out of the interior, only to find them gone, quite gone. And no trace. . . . Only a flash of recklessness. But, "pieced with all the rest," as she phrased it, that was enough. They somehow made it do.

"Those were terrible years," she told him again. "Black, black years. And yet I've always thanked God for them." She smiled sadly. "They taught me such bitter-sweet lessons."

"And I knew," he added, as his touch to the picture, "—when it was too late—how much I loved!"

He slid down on to the floor beside her chair.

"It just seemed fated that way, didn't it, Hugh?"

They sat this way a long while, gazing into the fire. A log snapped; sparks trailed up the wide chimney, and down, down, like fiery spirits, into the rich dark mirror of the pool. And still she seemed a mystery to him. He had a feeling she hadn't even begun to tell him all. He had filled such a little niche in her life. What of all the rest of it? Were there no other destinies than his bound up with hers? Had it been just music, *all* music? He held her hand against his cheek, as he had done once long ago. "Anna," he said a little thickly, "it's been all wrong and upside down. But now—look at us here. Doesn't this seem fated, too?"

She just met his gaze with a sad smile.

"You know you love me!"

"Yes, Hugh. I've always loved you."

"Then why do you hedge yourself away from me, and seem more out of my reach than ever before?"

His face was so solemn and clouded that she couldn't resist a tiny laugh. But when she spoke to him again her voice came tearfully. "Hugh, dear, it seems we're all still groping through the magic wood. There are forces"—and he felt the cloak of mystery drawn more and more closely about her

A DESTINY ALL UPSIDE DOWN 221

—“which must yet be overcome somehow—forces that might almost snuff the light out of things, even still. Hugh, dear?”

“Well, Anna?”

“We must keep our courage up a little while longer.”

She bent and kissed his hair.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

A WIDOWER AND A WIDOW

LEONORE set down her steaming pitcher and sadly closed the door. At least, thought the Voeuf, there were the necessary daily formalities to go through with, such as washing and dressing and eating breakfast, before it would be necessary for him to go downstairs again to call on the singer. He sighed with faint gratitude; and made just as much of these necessary activities as he could. Yet all the while the subject of his imminent interview was uppermost in his thoughts. It was cogitated, weighed, and vivisectioned. He pondered it with all the sober gravity which might have graced the bar, had not his career been blighted at the start. In fact, as the minutes and quarter hours succeeding breakfast slipped by, this careful and judicial attitude amounted to something dangerously bordering on procrastination.

After breakfast, for one thing, he was deliciously detained by Mrs. Brathers, who was full, as usual, of plans for making the hours immediately ahead pass brightly and profitably. Then it happened that his morning's mail contained a card from the Paris office of the *New York Herald* advising him that several packages had come. The packages probably contained Christmas presents from relations in America. This communication, which he was pleased to esteem a very great matter, afforded further excuse for not going at once down to Cyprienne's apartment. The business in town must be attended to before anything else.

However, just as this difficult matter was permanently settled, another complication arose. He was detained in the hall by Cassienda, who, having slept ill, was in no mood

to look lightly upon his failure to restore her poor brother's invention.

"You put me off with excuses," she complained. "You go, and you return—emptee-handed. I am no better off than before."

"Well, well, Cassienda," he said rather testily.

"But it is *not* well, well," she maintained. "I have put the matter all in your hands, Albert. And you see—it is no further along than before!"

"Well, the fact is," said Bromley, "I was interrupted by a very important matter of business—"

"Ah!" she cried, "I know. It was only about the street cars of Athens. Any day you may talk of *them*."

He turned a little pale. "How do you come by that?" he muttered.

"She shrugged. "Ah, it is no matter how." And then, drawing close to his ear, and speaking with the full flavour of her native sibilance, she said: "I am groweeng desperate again. So leetle—so leetle it is and it would be for me the reever. If it is not come today—" She broke off ominously. But Bromley knew, should he fail her next time, it would not be the river at all. Or if it should be a river it would be one for *him*.

She fled quickly away to her room and left him standing uncertainly. He stroked his crisp beard, trying to settle himself to the course which it would now be best to follow. What course should it be? What *was* the best thing to be done next? This moment of unhappy struggle was violated by Kenneth, who charged up like a cyclone and seized his guardian's arms.

"I have great news for you!" he cried.

"News?" And Mr. Bromley looked quite white and frightened. For news, especially brought by Kenneth, and delivered in so exultant a tone, might mean such a variety of horrid eventualities. Poor Bromley felt a little as the clergyman in the story must have felt when they brought him the anonymous warning: All is discovered; fly at once!

"The invention!" exclaimed Kenneth.

"Well?"

"Gone!"

"Gone?"

"Yes, sir—just like that! I tell you it isn't *there*!"

A new horror to grapple with. A trick, then. Yes, Sterrett had used the street cars of Athens, his beloved street cars, as a means of tricking him out of the invention. It seemed impossible anything so utterly disorganizing should have happened to him. His mind was chaos. He decided to go over the river after his packages.

Returning from town, Mr. Bromley reached the gate just as Mlle. Cyprienne was coming out of her door. The two met in the courtyard. It really seemed destined that meetings should occur in the courtyard—just as though there were a magnet concealed somewhere in its midst.

Mr. Bromley nodded stiffly, intending to go straight on past into the house; and was breathing his relief at another enforced postponement of the interview. He was scheduled to meet Mrs. Brathers—already she might be waiting for him. But since the singer spoke, pausing and uttering his name with a little hesitation, he naturally felt obliged to pause also and turn back to her.

"Mr. Bromley," she began, "I'm told you called on me last evening."

He looked somewhat bewildered—very much, in fact, the way he looked when Cassienda referred to the street cars of Athens. "I—I didn't leave my name. . . ."

"No," she replied, a little cryptically, "but I was sure it must be you. I've been expecting a call. You're concerned about Kenneth."

He faced her helplessly. She had the advantage. He had planned, somehow, a very different meeting—more formal, more dramatic. He had counted on being firm, aggressive, the principal speaker. Yet destiny prescribed that they meet this way, and now he confessed to himself that he didn't know



A WIDOWER AND A WIDOW 225

what to do or say next. They mutually turned and paced back toward the house. It really was, and must necessarily be recognized, a "scene"; and the courtyard, with all its inquisitive windows, was not just the most happy setting. A moment later they had entered her apartment.

"Mr. Bromley," she continued, since he appeared unable to take the stand she herself expected him to take, "*hasn't* my persecution gone far enough?" They paused in the first room at hand, which afforded Bromley a vague relief. He didn't want to get in any deeper just now than necessary. He swallowed uncomfortably, and she pressed her point. "I assure you," he managed to say at last, "it—it's as painful to me as to you. The strain of it all is wearing me to a shadow."

She couldn't resist a ghost of a smile; yet, slight as it was, he knew it for an equivalent of the assurance on her part that he'd never looked better in his life. This irritated Mr. Bromley. He knew it was the truth, and for that reason was irritated all the more. It placed him in a trying light—one he certainly didn't deserve, on top of all his other troubles, he told himself.

His forehead wrinkled, and he fumbled at the button of one of his trim gloves. Then he cleared his throat and went on. "I don't want to be unkind or hurt you. There isn't any need of that, if—"

"If only I'll bolt my door hereafter. That's it?"

She looked away a moment and then came back to him, resolutely fighting the emotion she felt. She began speaking crisply and almost aphoristically. "Mr. Bromley, you know even penitence wears itself out, like—well, like everything else, I guess. One would become so old-looking otherwise. Besides. . . ." But she left it there, and added instead: "I'm not at all sentimental about it. I'm perfectly frank when I ask you what is the harm?"

"But," he groped, "don't you see I haven't anything to do with it? Nothing at all except. . . . No," he went on, "it's just the law, he being placed in my charge. . . ."

Whatever might be said of the speech, it wasn't eloquent. And there seemed, too, a tiny element of insincerity in it—yet why? he desperately asked himself, since they both recognized the dubiousness of the long past. She replied with more coldness and spirit than she had yet shown. "I don't want to infringe on any of your rights, Mr. Bromley. I wouldn't for anything. Not for anything. You can't, really, think me so indelicate, considering what our relations have been."

There was another of the hard silences between them. Then he began saying something, though his words had not yet attained the pitch of intelligibility when she impulsively clasped her hands, looking at him squarely, and asked with great earnestness: "What do you want me to do?"

"I've nothing to demand," he seemed compelled to say after that. "I only implore—that is, I beg you to remember—to refrain from adding a new wrong. . . ."

It was quite evident that he had encountered a serious snag. However, by making ever so great an effort he brought himself up out of the dark depths, thought suddenly of Mrs. Brathers and the now past-due appointment, and observed in his dry tones, groping for a means of drawing this fruitless interview to a conclusion: "I suppose, after all, no real harm has been done yet."

She flashed: "I would rather efface myself utterly—"

And he straightened, interrupting her, and speaking now with greater incision. "Yes, yes, I know you'll help me!" After which a much less devious hint sprang to his lips: "What do you expect to gain by it after all?"

"To gain?" she repeated, herself a little mystified. Then, not desiring to show Mr. Bromley a weakness she could no longer quite resist, she pressed her lip with her teeth and lowered her head. After a moment she said thickly: "I'm afraid you think me hopelessly selfish."

"Eh?" he asked unhappily, observing her emotion. "No, no, Anna. Only. . . ."

They were just hopelessly sparring and dodging. There seemed no clear, straightforward way out. Bromley sat



A WIDOWER AND A WIDOW 227

wretchedly gazing at what he took to be a big octagonal packing case which stood awkwardly over in one corner of the room. He pitied himself with an almost eloquent pity. Then she lightened the situation a little by smiling; and she observed: "Isn't it just the perversity of fate, Mr. Bromley, that it had all to turn out this way?"

"It does look like—er—fate," agreed Mr. Bromley with solemn evasiveness; and stroked his whiskers in huge perplexity.

And then—well, though so painfully inconclusive, the issue seemed at least temporarily closed. They walked out together into the murk of the winter morning, stood talking a few moments more in the court, and then Cyprienne, smiling rather obscurely, bade him good-bye and passed on out to her waiting carriage.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

MRS. BRATHERS PUTS ON THE KETTLE TO BOIL

THE singer's departure left Mr. Bromley standing on the flagging of the court. He blinked soberly after the lady. She was as much beyond him as Kenneth was. He felt amazed at the variety of her moods, which seemed to flutter like lanterns at a Japanese feast. He wondered if it wasn't somehow her genius: being always beyond people. He sighed heavily, and passed a gloved hand across his sparse crop of beard. "Well," he pondered. "Well. . . ?" Certainly nothing had been accomplished by this interview. They were right where they were in the beginning. He wasn't, indeed, quite sure but they were worse off than ever! Could anything he had said, with his mind so in a daze, be construed as sanctioning . . . Oh, what *had* he said, and what had *she* said? At any rate, they were no better off. That was certain. Kenneth would continue to defy him, secretly when not openly. And she . . . this seemed her way of keeping the advantage.

But all at once his expression underwent a quick change. His eyes brightened, and he uttered words of flushed apology.

"Oh, dear Mrs. Brathers—what a pity! I'm late, I know. It's too bad. And I've worried you? And displeased you I know!"

She had come out into the bleak December morning well bundled. Her face was veiled, so that the look on it was only vaguely discernible.

"Had I not fortunately peeped from the window first," she said icily, "I might have walked right out on you while you were—engaged."

The Voef was startled into a momentary silence which,

however, did not tend to relieve the situation. She spoke again, still more icily. "You're sure you'd quite finished? She hasn't merely gone to give some instructions to her *cocher*? You know I wouldn't for the world—"

"Mrs. Brathers!" he cried "you make me dreadfully miserable! You *can't* think it was with design that this meeting just now took place?"

"One doesn't meet such women altogether by appointment," Mrs. Brathers answered tremulously. "My husband told me they may waylay you anywhere. He was often sorely beset, poor man. Oh, it is terrible!"

"But you can't think that I—"

"I think what my conscience bids me think," she said firmly. "And now I'm sure I'd better go over alone. You must come, of course, since you're invited. But I think it is best that we meet there."

The function under allusion was the luncheon, to which invitation had been extended by one of the bosom friends of the vivacious and learned Miss Davies.

"I—I will tell you the whole story," he cried earnestly. "Let me tell you as we ride over, and then you will understand and not blame me, I'm sure."

She surrendered. "Well."

"I'll fly and call a taxi!" he said, wonderfully relieved; although what she flung after him tended to sustain some doubt as to the imminent tranquillity of their relations.

"I don't see how you can possibly explain what I saw when I looked out of the window!"

In a few minutes the Voef came back, riding on the step. At the gate he swung off with alacrity and assisted her in.

"Don't you know you shouldn't ride like that, you foolish man?" she scolded. "Don't you know you might break your arm?"

"Then you *would* care?" he asked eagerly.

"Don't be absurd!" And she gently pushed his knee as the taxi tore round the corner.

She fairly gasped at the story he told her. "Now I understand why you were so anxious for me to warn him against going to see her," she said. "Ah, now I see it all!"

Her eyes were very wide and bright. True, she had her little season of pouting because she hadn't been taken into the Voef's full confidence much earlier in the game. He had had no right to put her off the way he had with mere generalities. Ultimately, however, as they drew up before a house in the very centre of the American quarter, sheer excitement swayed her utterly.

Of course she promised to keep it a close secret. Yet after all she had to hint just vaguely about it to her dear friend Annetta Davies; and when the hostess herself came up, catching the intriguing tail-end of her remarks, of course plain courtesy bade the widow take her a little into the confidence too . . . Bromley couldn't stay her. How could he bid those adorable lips to cease their music? The accomplished and worldly Miss Davies declared it one of the most baffling situations she had ever encountered. "And you know," emphasized Mrs. Brathers, as she and the Voef were returning home in their taxi, "she has really seen all phases of life."

Her promise not to divulge the secret to any of the inmates of Maison Bernard was, of course, very easily obtained. Oh yes—he might rest perfectly easy on the score of the secret's not getting out *there*!

"You see," said Mr. Bromley, in the manner of one who feels his security slipping rapidly from him, yet who desperately takes stock of what remains, determining to try to piece things out and worry along to the end, "I may, in one way or another, be able to wheedle him out of her company. I'm sure I don't know what the people at home would say if they knew. No doubt they would declare I wasn't a fit guardian. Well"—he had reached the lowest ebb of humility now—"I'm afraid I'm not. But how dreadful to have it known!"

A short time thereafter, while Mr. Bromley paced back and

forth in his chamber, his brain throbbing with the press of anxieties which the day had brought, or done so little to allay, he suddenly thrilled to the sound of a well-known step in the corridor. It was she! Could she be coming to him—perhaps to hand him the book on Athens bound in azure of which they had spoken at luncheon? But no—she pauses not. She is knocking next door!

"Cassienda, dear," says the beloved voice, so gentle and friendly.

A sound suspiciously like a final, sleep-relinquishing little snore. A faint creaking of the bed.

"Cassienda, Cassienda, dear. Are you in?"

"Yes, yesss. It is you dearree?"

Swing wide, ungracious barrier of wood, and separate no longer these loving widow hearts. For the widow from Scranton has a secret. . . .

"Cassienda dear, do come to my room. It's so cosy! I've a fire on the hearth, and we will make us a little cup of tea."

"Yes, yesss. I will come. A meenet—so. Now I will come with you, dearree."

"Do bring your crocheting, and we'll have *such* a cosy time!"

"Yes, here—I have it. So. Now we are rready. I had a little nap, so you will not mind my hair?"

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

MRS. BRATHERS GOES CALLING IN BOHEMIA

AT breakfast the next morning Mrs. Brathers appeared keenly awake. Hers was unmistakably the bearing of a woman who has discovered a fresh mission in life.

Mr. Bromley, observing her suppressed air of excitement, her gentle flame of eye, instantly connected them, if vaguely, with yesterday's call at Cassiendra's door. He began to fidget and looked very solemn and anxious. Cassiendra, when she came to the table, appeared also actuated by some inner buoyancy. Hers was, however, the more abstracted manner of one who is thinking a matter out. Kenneth stirred his chocolate and consumed his one little roll with that habitual eagerness to be off and doing which never knew any fluctuation. When he bounded away, turning to the door to favour the remaining company with a half military salute, Mrs. Brathers turned to discover the Voëuf's sad eyes upon her. She said "Ah," just audibly. And then she conceived a very great and sudden interest in the precise buttering of her *petit pain*.

Miss Curtis was the last to breakfast this morning, and slipped in at an hour so perilously close to closing time as to win from Madame an impatient scowl. But Miss Curtis found in Mrs. Brathers, as it chanced, an admirer who had miraculously warmed toward her over night. The ill success of the widow's connivance in the direction of a matrimonial alliance between herself and Jacques had tended to breathe a slight coolness into the match-maker's attitude of late. Jacques, observing this, had been afforded considerable amusement, which found vent in a well concealed sarcastic by-play with his mother. But Miss Curtis, if she had noticed the coolness at all, had had little time to be curious

GOES CALLING IN BOHEMIA : 233

as to its cause. Behind the eternal "sure-ons" she was busy with her dreams. However, this morning she could hardly help noting the added warmth in Mrs. Brathers' bearing.

"My dear Miss Curtis," the latter exclaimed, waylaying her in the hall as, on the precise stroke of the clock, Madame and her servants began sweeping all before them, "do you know—I've never once had a peep into your atelier! I've really meant so many times to come. . . ."

"It's never too late," laughed Miss Curtis.

"Oh, it's terribly nice of you to want me, my dear. You're sure I shouldn't be putting you out? It seems a shame I've seen so little of your work!"

"I'm sure I should be very pleased to have you come, Mrs. Brathers, any time you will."

"Is there any time that's better than another?"

"Oh, no. Come just whenever you like."

"Why, then—shall we say—perhaps this very afternoon?"

"Yes, indeed. If you'll come around four o'clock I'll give you tea."

"Oh, will you? That would be so cosy! I—I'll bring my knitting along, and we can have a good talk."

Mr. Bromley came up as Miss Curtis departed, her voluminous woolen skirt flapping about her ankles.

"It's so tiresome," he began at once, "I come to Paris to get away from worry and ordinary people. But my friends follow me right over. Here's a letter—I've just read it—from a man I haven't seen for at least two years—writes that he's just arrived, and is afraid to go outside his hotel for fear he'll get lost. He says he came over to join his wife, and finds she's gone on to Vienna. He's right from America—can't speak a word of French (think of that!)—and holds every foreigner under suspicion. He wants me to go and see him through. A dreadful man, who doesn't always use good grammar!"

"How very extraordinary!" said Mrs. Brathers.

"What am I to do about it?" he pleaded. "It isn't likely, if I do go to him, I can get him on his way before evening."

"Well," she suggested calmly, "you must just devote the day entirely to him. You see, you'll *have* to."

He looked at her queerly, and with a kind of petitioning disappointment. "Once he has me in his clutches, he'll hold on for dear life. He'll—he'll make me go shopping with him! I remember his weakness very well."

"His weakness?" This naturally would interest her!

"Yes. Buying presents for his wife!"

"I call that very charming!" she said quite ardently. "Timothy often bought me presents—at the most *unexpected* times. He'd generally hide them, and then I'd search everywhere till I'd found them. Sometimes I would find presents in his pockets—presents he pretended he didn't know were there!"

"She's a very frivolous woman," continued Bromley, preferring to ignore the pretty playfulness of the deceased. "He never knows what she may be up to. Poor Old Fred. He'll want to buy something very splendid this time, for fear it may be a flirtation that has carried her into Austria. I know him. That's the only real hold he has."

"His money?"

"Yes, his vulgar money."

Mr. Bromley naturally expected to be scolded for deserting Mrs. Brathers. Or he expected righteous pouting. The very *least* he expected was a bit of sympathy. But in all these expectations he was disappointed. Mrs. Brathers responded, quite brightly: "Of course you must go to your friend. It will be showing him a great kindness at a time when he's really in need of it. I'm sure that, under the circumstances, you couldn't act otherwise."

"But—"

"Never mind our little plans for the day. The pictures I'm sure, will keep. I understand the Society has been asked to retain the collection for another two weeks. So you see we can easily postpone our visit. In fact she was desperately cheerful about it."

"Oh, Lord!" he complained, "I don't want to go and help him buy presents for his wife!"



GOES CALLING IN BOHEMIA 235

"But it may not be so bad as you fancy. At any rate, you must certainly devote your entire day to him. We must serve our fellow creatures cheerfully, whenever we are called upon. My husband used to say so often that one's first duty is toward those in trouble."

But extracts from the collective philosophy of Timothy Brathers never cheered Mr. Bromley at all. He gazed on her quite mournfully, the more so because she could be so sweetly and optimistically resigned to what must keep them apart a whole day.

At a little before four o'clock in the afternoon, Mrs. Brathers set out alone to visit the studio in Place Saint Sulpice. She walked quite briskly, and displayed an amazing fearlessness at the street corners. Just as she was leaving rue Bonaparte and entering the square, someone crept stealthily up behind and grasped both her arms. She was dreadfully frightened, and uttered a little scream.

"Oh, you're an unkind and wicked boy!" she cried, when breath came back to her. "How dare you give people such frights as that? You know I never venture out into Paris alone, and the very first time I do, to have such a shock as that! Where can you have got such a wicked spirit, I wonder?" she asked, shaking her head at the same time, as though to convey the settled impression that, for her part, she was resigned in the assurance that no one could answer so utterly baffling a question.

"Don't you think our ancestors must be responsible for such things, Mrs. Brathers?" he demanded innocently.

"Dear me, don't let's begin a discussion of heredity! My clergyman used to say it does no good at all to discuss such things. People are simply what they are. If they do wrong—"

"Mrs. Brathers," he interrupted, "will you answer me truthfully one straight question? Just one?"

"Why, it all depends upon the question. I shan't answer anything foolish or wicked."

"Mrs. Brathers, do you believe in hell?"

She caught her breath a little, and proceeded a moment without speaking. Then, seeming to decide that, dreadful as it might sound, this was, after all, merely a point in theology, she replied: "Yes, Kenneth, I do."

"A regular hell?"

"Well, of course I don't know what it is like, but I certainly do believe wicked people will be sent there after they're dead."

"Do you think I will go there?" he asked, almost wistfully.

"Oh, what a depressing subject this is! How did we ever get started on it?" And then, as an afterthought, she added, smiling pointedly: "You had better be good from now on!"

They had by this time reached the gate of the house in which Miss Curtis had her atelier. Mrs. Brathers slackened her pace, then paused, undecided.

"Going up?" demanded Kenneth.

"Why, I don't know. . . ."

"Good! I don't mind going along too. She'll always give you tea about this time—unless something is turning out too very badly."

With his arm still linked through hers, Kenneth insinuated Mrs. Brathers across the court. She held back a little. Things weren't working as she had planned. Her step wavered, and he turned with a question.

"Why, yes," she admitted, "I *was* going up for a minute. I thought I would. I told Miss Curtis I might drop in and see her. But. . . ."

"Come on," he urged, quite dragging the reluctant and perplexed widow after him. "If you're ever so enthusiastic, you may get some of the *marons glacés*. She keeps them in a jar back of the crayon box, and she never brings them out unless she's convinced she's the greatest painter since—oh, well, for ever and ever so far back."

They were at the door. Mrs. Brathers was puffing, for he had hurried her unmercifully. Then the door opened and Miss Curtis beamed out upon them.

The current canvas stood on an easel; and, naturally, the



GOES CALLING IN BOHEMIA 237

callers went right up to it. *A Breath of Music* she called it. It was all full of what looked singularly like soap bubbles. And such you might reasonably have thought them, until the young artist contributed the information that they weren't, indeed, soap bubbles at all, but flute trebles—which is really a very different matter.

"It's superb!" exclaimed Kenneth, poking Mrs. Brathers delicately and discreetly by way of reminding her about the confection behind the crayon box.

"You think so?" asked Miss Curtis modestly, stepping back and letting her head drop to one side with an air of tender criticism.

"Indeed, I think it's *wonderful*, my dear, how you go about these ambitious things all by yourself!" said Mrs. Brathers.

And the artist just murmured: "I'm happy in my work."

"What lovely colors!" continued Mrs. Brathers. "I once had the *sweetest* shawl, just that shade of lavender. My husband gave it to me. I think he bought it at the World's Fair."

Miss Curtis's eyebrows looked pained. She decided tea and crackers would do for that afternoon. Kenneth noted this unfortunate turn in the tide, and hastened to make quite a neat little impromptu speech, quoting what some one had said, and mentioning Fra Angelico in a comparative sense—not, of course, without some quaking, for it was an ambitious plunge. But he got away with it quite well. "Perhaps I'll bring out the *marons* later on," she thought.

But Mrs. Brathers coughed and Mrs. Brathers began to fidget; for Mrs. Brathers hadn't come to the atelier to look at pictures. No, she had come there for other reasons altogether. In fact, she had come there to struggle against temptation. Yesterday, before her small coaxing fire, over teacups shared with Cassiendra, Mrs. Brathers had struggled against temptation—and lost. How valiantly she had struggled no one would ever know. But the battle had proved too much for her. So she had yielded. Yes, she had yielded

—as she certainly had had no intention of doing in the beginning. And now—and now the very same temptation was upon her again. She hadn't courted it. She had proposed this little visit out of pure friendliness; and there had been merely the underlying determination that should temptation present itself, she could do no more than hold out against it as long as possible. But how could she even begin struggling so long as Kenneth was hanging around?

"I have a friend at the Beaux-Arts," Miss Curtis said, "who thinks he's going to be awfully pleased with this picture. I won't mention his name," she went on, "because you might think me conceited. He's really quite famous. His photograph and a long article about him were in the last number of *Loin de la Foule*."

A friend? *Loin de la Foule*? Mrs Brathers pricked up her ears. She scribbled the name of the publication on the back of one of her calling cards. "After all," she thought, with great earnestness, "I may have been mistaken in Jacques Bernard."

But Mrs. Brathers hadn't come even to meditate upon the prospects of getting Miss Curtis married. "Oh, dear!" she wailed. "What do you think I've done?"

"Life's too short," sighed Kenneth.

Although a trifle disconcerted, she kept up on the sheer force of her idea. "I've just completely forgotten about getting my herb tonic from rue Cambon! Isn't it awful? And I took the very last of the old bottle after *déjeuner*." (She took it after each meal now.) "Oh, Kenneth, dear, can't you be a dear good boy and skip over the river after a new bottle?"

Kenneth blinked thoughtfully. "I suppose you'd have a devil of a night without it."

"Oh, fearful! I shouldn't sleep even a wink, really! Here's the money, and you must ride both ways, of course."

Satan leaned confidentially down and whispered something in his ear. His face lighted. He jumped to his feet. "All right, Mrs. Brathers."

"I'll do something very nice for you one of these days," she said gaily. "Here's the money. It's dreadfully expensive. It costs twelve francs a bottle. Which would you rather do, go by 'bus or by taxi?"

"Taxi, if you don't mind."

"Very well, then, here's five francs more."

He was staring very hard at the crayon box, and threw his *pèlerine* round his shoulders reluctantly. But the devil consoled him. He saluted and was off.

However, the price wasn't to be so exorbitant, for kind-hearted Miss Curtis, remembering that he had pronounced her painting superb, came running out to the landing after him. "Here's something to nibble on the way," she said. And he gratefully took from her a fistful of *marons*.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

KENNETH GOES AFTER THE HERB TONIC

HE sauntered into the bright little shop, whistling cryptically, bought some chewing gum and an illustrated paper, then quite as an afterthought, enquired of the proprietor—a prosperous, well-fed chemist with clipped hair and a very round rosy face, who was rapidly becoming a millionaire, thanks to American nerves—whether it would be possible to acquire an empty tonic bottle. Kenneth had, he explained, a very special use for it, and no other kind of bottle would do.

"Mais, bien sûr," replied the chemist, rummaging around under the counter until he found one. The herb tonic was famous, and even the bottles partook of the glory. They had secure patent stoppers, and people were continually finding them convenient for other purposes than those to which the shop ordinarily put them. Any way the proprietor was perfectly cheerful over the transaction, since by selling an empty tonic bottle for a franc it was possible to make in the neighborhood of seventy-five per cent. profit on that deal alone.

Outside it was, by this time, almost dark. Kenneth sniffed the air with an excess of delight.

The devil and he linked arms and sped along. Presently they disappeared from sight. And when they emerged, the herb tonic bottle was no longer empty. It was full right up to the stopper. And the fluid which it contained was good, stout, pungent rum.

The devil, having accomplished this neat stroke of business, and feeling certain that his disciple would not weaken in



THE HERB TONIC

241

the sequel, left his side and made off after a little variety actress who chanced just at that moment to be passing.

Darkness came rapidly across the city. Lights, which would soon be dimmed because of German bombs, shone out now with great sprightliness. Yes, soon all would be changed. The comedy would be played out. The last hurried rites would be performed over the still subtly lingering Victorian era. But the curtain had not yet quite fallen. And the big guns held their peace.

At this hour life was always most thrilling. Of an old woman hovering over a street corner brazier Kenneth bought some roasted chestnuts, smelled of them with delight, felt their warmth as they reposed in his pocket, and ate them happily. Life was very bright and very fine. There was too much of it to be grasped. He sighed, then whistled. It remained to grasp all you could.

At the Place du Châtelet he descended into a scarcely less populous underground region where, on the required stratum, he awaited a Métro train which would whirl him over the Pont Saint Michel and so onward, in a twinkling, to Saint Germain des Prés.

As Kenneth stood peering down the long tunnel, watching for the lights of his train, suddenly, in the thick of the crowd, he spied a familiar pair of military shoulders. Mr. Bromley was effecting a transfer at this station, and was also homeward bound. Kenneth elbowed and ducked his way through the press till he bumped up against his guardian. It wasn't until then that he perceived Bromley to be in conversation with Sterrett.

"Oh, yes," Bromley was saying in that solemn and rasping tone which invariably went with the matter under discussion, "I've often thought it might be possible to build a subway in Athens. Eh?" He turned quickly round. "Oh, it's Kenneth." Sterrett snapped his eyes pleasantly.

"Well," Bromley said, with a huge sigh of relief, "I've just been seeing my friend off to Vienna. I watched till the

train actually pulled out, so there wouldn't be a chance of his not staying aboard. Such a day as I've had!"

"Of course he made you go shopping with him, sir?"

"Yes, he dragged me the whole length of the rue de la Paix, and ended by buying on the Avenue after all. A great brooch! It makes my eyes ache now when I think of it!"

"So bad as all that?" asked Sterrett.

"Unspeakable!"

"What was it like?" Kenneth wanted to know.

"Oh, it was shaped like a starfish, and had amethysts dangling on gold chains from each of the points."

"But he liked it?"

"Yes, of course. He was delighted, and he said he knew his wife would be, too."

"You don't think Mrs. Brathers would have cared for it?" Kenneth demanded sweetly.

"Ugh! How can you speak so?"

"I've heard women are fond of such things."

The train whizzed in at that moment, and Bromley made no reply. However, the trifling conversation on the platform set him thinking. The boy was right. Women did care for nice things. Christmas was at hand. Well, he would see. He would think it over carefully. Who knew if something supremely stunning might turn the tide?

"Well," said Sterrett, "I've just finished a stroke of business."

"What is it?" asked Kenneth.

"Oh, really a very big deal. I've sold all my stock in the street cars of Athens!"

"Aha!"

"Er, yes," Bromley admitted, with a look of solemn pride.

"Of course," said Sterrett, "the dividends aren't so much—just now."

"No, but later," Bromley assured them hopefully, "when the new branch is built. . . . I *must* brush up on the Greek verbs." He was in a state of exaltation again. Then he brightened still more. There was other good news to tell.

It had been a fortunate day, after all. The invention—they were on the track of it. It might take a little time—a business deal—Mr. Sterrett—there was someone he had to consult. . . .

"An accomplice?" asked Kenneth.

The car lurched. It was very crowded. They were standing in the central vestibule. Bromley grasped Kenneth's arm for support. As he did so his hand touched the large bottle which was concealed by the folds of the *pèlerine*.

"What have you got there?" he demanded. Good Lord! A bottle! What were things coming to?

But Kenneth was ready with a quick response: "I'm on an errand for Mrs. Brathers."

Then a queer look, combining pique and jealousy, entered the Voëuf's homely face. It was the first day he had been obliged to spend outside the charm of her companionship, and already, in these few hours, she had found herself a new staff to lean on. Mr. Bromley could hardly think of the lad beside him as a rival. Still, he gazed down at him very gloomily.

"Did she ask you to go for her?"

"Yes. It's a matter of great importance. Herb tonic."

Remorse deepened the widower's pain. He himself had promised to get the herb tonic today. He had failed her, and—who knew?—she may have suffered—*everything*—through having to go without it! He demanded, steadying himself for another curve, how Mrs. Brathers was, and whether she looked at all ill. Kenneth admitted he thought she did, a little. Then remorse grew into positive agony. "You don't think she's dangerously ill?" But even the heart of Kenneth was vulnerable. "Not dangerously, I'm quite sure," he replied.

The Voëuf brightened. "Would you mind," he asked as the train slowed down for the des Près station, "if I took the tonic in to her?"

"Sir?"

"I say, would you mind letting me—"

"Oh, certainly not, sir." Kenneth could be magnanimous.

"You take it right in, so as not to lose any time. And, if you say so, I'll stop and buy her some flowers. You could tell her, if you liked, that you sent me for them."

"As a man of ideas you'll certainly succeed in life!" laughed Sterrett.

The Vocuf's hope was reviving. He thrust into Kenneth's ready fist enough money to fairly buy out any one of the small flower stalls of the city, and eagerly took the bottle under his own arm.

Kenneth felt himself rolling in wealth. But this wasn't all. Bromley was gone, but Sterrett lingered.

"I believe," he said, "I'll get you, if you will, to do me a favour also."

"Flowers?"

"Yes. For you see, in spite of everything, I'm still an outsider."

"It looks as if you want me to keep right on being an accomplice," said Kenneth with a laugh.

"If you don't mind."

"What sort of flowers?" demanded the boy.

"Roses," said Sterrett positively, "And I've a special stall on the Boulevard—they know me. As a matter of fact, I guess I'll just stroll along and see the deal through. A man naturally feels particular in a case of this kind."

"Do you want to put a card in?"

"No, just tell her they're from a fellow who's outside."

"Not really outside, mooning up and down?" asked Kenneth with some alarm.

"Well," the other laughed, "she'll understand."

"I'm afraid you've got it very bad, sir," observed the boy solemnly.

"You've no idea how bad!" And there was a real thrill in the mighty hunter's voice.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

THE INVENTION GETS UNDER WAY AGAIN

THEY held a committee meeting in the music room—Cyprienne and Kenneth and the mighty hunter. The invention had been brought in and now held a position of honour directly under a medieval coat of mail which hung against one of the pieces of tapestry. The question on the carpet was that covering its return. It was in vain that Cyprienne and Sterrett argued a simple delivery upstairs. Why insist upon looking at the situation as devious and involved? But Kenneth held out. There were dramatic values to consider. He wouldn't give his consent.

"What first has to be decided," he maintained, "is about Bromley."

"I'm afraid we had been rather overlooking him," smiled the singer. And Sterrett agreed: "For there is, after all, an Epoch at stake."

"You think," asked Cyprienne, "that it would really make a difference?"

"Oh, an enormous difference," Kenneth assured her. "That's why it seems to me we must manage without him."

"Without him," mused Sterrett. Then he went on more briskly: "But you aren't considering me. For after all, though I suppose I'd live through it, the transfer of that bit of Athenian stock hasn't been formally completed yet, and he might, you see, back out."

"Yes," Cyprienne agreed, "we mustn't overlook the street cars of Athens!"

"Let's see where we are," suggested Sterrett. "We've been getting in so deep here we don't know just what progress has been made. Let's see. Kenneth has upset the notion of de-

livering the invention ourselves, because that would be slighting the dramatic values. But directly we admit this point, the objection is raised that because it would be vital to Mr. Bromley's happiness that he himself be allowed to deliver the invention, something seems to go radically wrong with the dramatic values, and we're told that for this very reason we must manage without him! Perhaps you can clear up our mental fog, monsieur."

"Why, it's simple enough," Kenneth replied. "We'd been forgetting the second alimony."

"Ah," said Cyprienne, "the second alimony! But I hardly see how the facts hang together."

"Perhaps they don't," continued Kenneth doggedly. "But whatever the facts do, it would be just like throwing away so much ready cash to let the invention go with only a mere thank you."

However, his tone wasn't very convincing. And when Sterrett reminded him that if the Epoch went to smash Bromley would be launched upon another of his "difficult" periods (which meant reading him to sleep and no end of bother) the point was grudgingly conceded. No, Kenneth admitted, he couldn't afford to have the Epoch come to an end either, though of course the more times it could be brought to the dizzy edge the better. He gave his reluctant consent that Mr. Bromley be brought into the meeting. It wasn't exactly the way he had meant things to go, and the matter of the second alimony would be left still in the air. He had half planned an intricate programme whereby Bromley should be made to struggle far more strenuously for possession of the mysterious box. But, after all, let them have their way. Yes, for his own sake the Epoch must be preserved. And, who knew? The invention might still hold possibilities.

Bromley came down looking very solemn and a little white. He couldn't help feeling it was some kind of trap. Then, too, his head was all in a whirl over the invention's being in Anna's house, and over Sterrett's being there, and Kenneth's

being there also, and over being there himself. But the great central emotion was one of immense relief. There, at any rate, like a rock in the midst of a drifting sea of chaos, stood the invention.

"So that's it," observed the widower rather fatuously, stroking his short whiskers and trying to look at the baffling box with an expression of tolerable intelligence.

"Yes," said Sterrett. "But after all, it may not be so bad as it looks. At least, I can picture her joy at getting it back. She'll hug it and kiss it. She'll be grateful to you as long as she lives. You're to be congratulated, Mr. Bromley."

Bromley cleared his throat uneasily. "Er, yes." And then he said: "I suppose we might get the *concierge* to carry it up."

And he hastened on ahead to prepare for its august coming. It really seemed as though the gods were beginning to smile on him a little after all.

The reunion in the chamber of Cassienda was something never to be forgotten.

After Mr. Bromley had communicated to her the glad tidings that the invention was on the way upstairs, she wept and she laughed and she kept running out into the corridor to see whether it had rounded the corner yet. She was so happy she didn't know what to do. She ran and got Mrs. Brathers. She wanted Mrs. Brathers to be there too when the box arrived.

And when the invention came in, Cassienda did just exactly what Sterrett knew she'd do: rushed up and tried to hug the ungainly box, and kissed it fervently, and laid her withered cheek against one of its slats in a caress that was really touching.

And then the little Señorita looked at her former husband, who had so importantly ushered the invention in, and burst into a flood of grateful tears. She impulsively ran right up and embraced Mr. Bromley in the very presence of Mrs. Brathers, who was too much moved herself to look upon what secretly horrified him as anything more than the tre-

mendous emotional stress of the scene legitimized, or even seemed to make essential.

And after that the Voeuf carried Mrs. Brathers proudly off to look at some pictures at the Petit Palais.



CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

DEJEUNER A LA FOURCHETTE

BUT there was additional good fortune in store for the little Spanish widow, who, in the midst of her new heart stirring happiness, was somehow a more pathetic figure than ever. Cyprienne, who, from the start, had manifested interest in Cassienda, now suggested to Kenneth that she might be able to help get the teller of fortunes established professionally in Paris. Cassienda was eager to have a tiny shop of her own and sit all day in the midst of a throng, weaving destinies. It certainly was a queer, gypsy sort of profession. But in a sense only the gods are pickers and choosers.

"I'd like, if she would come, to have you both in to *déjeuner*," said Cyprienne. "I know the Señorita's terribly odd, and of course as a rule one doesn't go about nibbling turnip. But I can't help somehow liking her. Would she come, do you suppose? I rather fancy there may be an opposition party in the house."

"The Conservatives?" suggested Kenneth, "—we being plainly Radical!"

She smiled at the political aspect. "Yes perhaps—something like that."

"Oh, I'm sure she will," said Kenneth. "When?"

"Well, if it isn't too abrupt," replied the prospective hostess, "why not today?"

"Oh, yes!"

"It's ridiculously short notice. I'm sure I ought to be more formal."

"Don't you worry. We'll *come*," said Kenneth with polite but unassailable finality. "What time?"

"About one?"

"One," he repeated after her.

"I lunch very simply," she warned him.

Kenneth, as he anticipated, encountered no major difficulties in securing Cassienda's acceptance. It is true, her consent was at first a little hesitant. It might, she feared—and not without reason—place her in a rather difficult position, should the fact leak out. Her fealty to Mrs. Brathers must, of course, be acknowledged as supreme. And Mrs. Brathers hadn't painted her a very admirable Cyprienne. But the singer was, like herself, divorced. They had a sad something in common. Besides, now, there was a strong romantic appeal. Yes, she would go. Must she write a formal note of acceptance?

"No," said Kenneth, feeling again for a moment the odd little tight feeling in his throat, "nothing of that sort will be necessary, for you see I've already accepted for us both—in advance."

So the Señorita began looking over all her ribbons and sashes.

In the first place, Cyprienne said: "Any friend of Kenneth's is my friend also—or one I'd like for a friend." However queer, she might have added. For certainly the Señorita was eccentric.

All through luncheon the little Spanish lady warmed more and more, till at its conclusion there was a genuine though subtle conflict launched in her heart: *which one of the widows did she choose?* Some sort of choice seemed imperative. However, time brought its compromises.

Cyprienne had warned them that the luncheon wouldn't be elaborate; but the affair seemed marvelously elaborate indeed to her guests, who naturally stacked it against the sort of mid-day repasts standard in Maison Bernard.

The three sat down at a round table in a small cheerful sunroom which opened directly upon the garden. The win-

dows were bordered with chintz. There were flowers on the table, which had come mysteriously from someone outside.

At first the little Spanish widow was inclined to be shy. However, she soon grew genial and even rather sentimental under the spell. Was this, indeed, the harsh, suspicious, venomous creature who had pounced out upon Kenneth at the *marché* and so gripped his arm? Was this the vixen who had blazed at poor scared Mr. Bromley in the little corridor? Was this the shrew who had slapped the face of gentle Mrs. Brathers? Yes, it was quite the same *Señorita*. But it was a *Señorita* upon whom the kindness of her many new friends was working like Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup.

"*Señorita*, a mango? Some celery?"

"I thank you kindly."

Cyprenne was wondering just how much the other widow *did* know; but on her own side the *Señorita* was also wondering—well, about many things.

Duck, with an ingenious embellishment of turnip, followed the soup. The dish was set down before Kenneth.

"Would you mind serving?" asked Cyprienne. "I—I thought it would be pleasant that way."

Kenneth acquiesced with great cheerfulness and an undaunted spirit, though he was about as familiar with the vivisection of ducks as were the samurai of the Tokugawa era with a telephone!

"You've certainly won the *Señorita's* heart!" he cried, heaping the little cubical bits of turnip on her plate. "She really *requires* it, you know, just the way Mrs. Brathers requires her herb tonic."

This brought a general laugh, though also something like a furtive pang of disloyalty in the *Señorita's* breast. There seemed to be a delicately veiled hostility down here toward Mrs. Brathers.

A cool, tart salad of endive found them discussing another phase of the life upstairs.

"Did you ever hear of a M. Froc?" Kenneth demanded.

"No," replied the hostess. "Who is he?"

"He has just died, and M. Bernard has gone to Dijon to attend his funeral."

"You theenk so?" queried Cassienda, shrewdly pursing her lips.

Kenneth laughed. "At least, there's more quiet now." And he gave the singer a brief sketch of the Bernard family tangle.

Cassienda said she thought Madame was to be pitied for what she had so long supported, and felicitated her on the deliverance.

"Mrs. Brathers doesn't think so," said Kenneth.

"What does Mrs. Brathers think?" asked Cyprienne.

"Oh, her sympathies are all on the other side. She told me so. She said—and he mimicked her very successfully—: 'I always felt such a high regard for M. Bernard. He received so little attention or thoughtfulness from his family.' "

"Then you really think he's gone for good?" the singer questioned.

"Oh, no," Kenneth replied earnestly, "he's only gone to Dijon to attend the funeral of his dear friend, M. Froc!"

There was heavenly fromage Pont-l'Evêque. There were fine imported peaches. Then the café noir.

"Now shall we go in to the fire?" suggested Cyprienne.

As they walked she slipped an arm through Kenneth's and another through the Señorita's. It was thus they entered the great room which was like the camp of the hunter.

Señorita's little flashing eyes went round in wonder. "A pool—and a fire—and so many furs!"

"Yes, these are the spoils of the chase."

Cassienda stooped impulsively and patted a large panther. Kenneth threw himself down upon the outstretched hide of a huge grizzly bear. This was a good deal more pretentious than the fluff rug upstairs; also there was considerably more animal about it. The boy laid his head familiarly upon the head of the prostrate bruin, and ran a finger round and round on the surprising glass eyes. An odd wave of sentiment stole over him as he lay there. He had never definitely known anything

DEJEUNER A LA FOURCHETTE 253

like it before. It was almost like a pang of homesickness. He fell a-dreaming.

Cyprienne and Cassienda sat in low chairs, their toes extended toward the blaze.

"You would like best of all to go on telling fortunes?"

"I cannot do anytheeng else."

"Shoo! But of course it's to settle on what would make you happiest."

"I believe it would be telling fortunes."

"Then fortunes it must be!"

"But you think I could get a start?"

"In Paris there's a chance for everyone. And if you'll let me, or there's anything I can do...."

"I suppose a home must be like this," mused the lad on the bearskin.

"Thank you kindlee," the little Señorita was saying. She timidly touched the sleeve of the singer's gown—a brief, deferential caress. She had a new friend. The singer was offering to help her! Yet she knew she would not dare even hint to Mrs. Brathers that she told fortunes!

"It's an adventure, don't you think so, Master Kenneth?" demanded Cyprienne.

He nodded up happily from the hearth. He had not heard what they were saying, but he knew it was an adventure.

"It would seem to me," the singer resumed thoughtfully, "that a little shop somewhere on the Boulevard des Italiens might be best. There isn't another street in the world where so many interests meet. And people, people, people! I must make inquiries," she went on. "And when you're settled, we'll all come to have our fortunes told. I'll make everybody at the Opéra come. And to Kenneth"—she looked down at the top of his head—"to Kenneth we'll assign the Sorbonne district. Do you hear what we're saying, monsieur? You'll have to rout out all those solemn professors of yours, and every one of their *élèves*. They must all come and have their palms read."

Kenneth had a momentary
Ferruco in her little fortune.
How shocked dear Mrs. Brath
out about it! Of course they
spiracy of silence and secrecy
fession. All the same, he told
sist conducting Mrs. Brathers in
text that it was a kind of ice cr
you could get tea!

Cassienda looked at the sing
little darting eyes. And then a
"My fortunes always come true!"



CHAPTER FORTY

SENORITA PONDERS—

AND so," concluded Mrs. Brathers with a sigh of ecstasy regretfully relinquished, "you see, Madam, what mystery and romance have been going on all the while right under this very roof!"

Madame drank the last of the tea in her cup and passed the back of one hand briskly across her lips. "*Oui, c'est vraiment extraordinaire.*"

"I really think," commented the accomplished Miss Davies in her enviable French, "that I have never encountered anything quite so romantic in my life." It was a sentiment which the lady had expressed in this connection upon a number of occasions, yet each time it bore such a spontaneity of elocution as to convey the stamp of genuine freshness. And each repetition, of course, stimulated in Mrs. Brathers a sense of being most beautifully involved herself. Was it not she who was at least responsible for the promulgation of the romantic news?

"Of course," continued Miss Davies, "for *my* part, I'm not an advocate of old-fashioned morality at all. The woman's past interests me—I may say a great deal—as a piece of daring. Women are breaking away more and more from the old restraints placed on them by a masculine code. Nevertheless, of course we have many things to consider, including—yes, what the world thinks, in a sense." This was what one called being spiritually enfranchised—yet artistically!

Miss Annetta Davies possessed a fine and admirable mind, carefully trained, and filled with all the things most worth while. Her plane of thought was at once lofty and catholic. It was one of her most important theories that she was never

actuated by motives of a purely moral nature, but by a far grander "synthetic" philosophy. In a word, she was a superb sort of person, and she moved about distributing her gifts everywhere. One of the things Miss Davies especially believed in was the survival of the fittest. The fit alone were entitled to inherit the riches of earth. It was the place of the fortunate to judge, though all judgment should be touched with the appreciation of an organic rather than a psychological tendency of the human race to evil. Poor human race! How incomparably Miss Davies stood above it! How righteously she could smile at its monumental foolishness! Getting back to the singer, Miss Davies honestly thought she knew all there was to know about Mlle. Cyrienne of the Opéra—all, at least, that need be known to make judgment of her feasible, indeed irresistible. Clever and wordly and dreadfully profound, Annetta Davies hoped by this time she was able to supply for herself, through an intellectual (almost scientific) imagination, such sides of any given case as those with whom she was in communication might be unable or unwilling to present to actual view. She was like Kenneth's remarkable Yogi Max, who, wrapt in meditation, and by merely pressing an archæological fragment to the head, could reconstruct the entire civilization to which the fragment once belonged—at least he claimed he could.

All in all, it wasn't difficult to see why Mrs. Brathers adored Miss Davies. And naturally she rejoiced in showing her off whenever it was possible to do so. This, now, was a happy—a truly immortal—afternoon, since, during the span of the brief tea hour in the salon, she was enabled both to exhibit the supreme Miss Davies and to enjoy another of those grim grapples with temptation. These grapplings and persistent surrenders were coming to be quite the thing. Madame was the last to be told, unless one counted the servants—which would of course, be absurd.

"And now," Mrs. Brathers concluded, setting down the forbidden cup, "you must promise, dear Madam, to keep all



this a secret. Not a soul besides us must know it. I could never forgive myself were Kenneth to learn, somehow, the truth through my having spoken as I have to a very few of my special friends. We must be very careful, we three. You see"—she averted her gaze, transferring it coyly to the carpet—"Mr. Bromley told me. It was a confidence. And I wouldn't betray a confidence for the whole world!"

Madame's being any more strictly pressed under oath was prevented at this point by the timid entry of Cassienda. She had heard voices in the salon, and, suddenly remembering that she must have left her crocheting in there, was very glad to avail herself of a perfectly legitimate excuse. It is to be feared that Cassienda was growing just a little bit spoiled, with all these new and ardent friendships blooming about her. She couldn't bear the thought of being left out of anything—not anything at all.

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Brathers, springing to her feet and running to grasp the widow's hand and lead her in, "I'm so glad you have come, Cassienda. I was just on the point of going to look for you. This is my dear friend Annetta Davies, of whom you've heard me speak so often. I do want you to know each other!"

Señorita bobbed her head shyly in the direction of the world's eighth wonder. She would have felt more comfortable looking at the pyramids or the hanging garden of Babylon. She sat meekly down beside Mrs. Brathers on the short silk sofa and surrendered her hand.

Directly Miss Davies ascertained that Cassienda hailed from Madrid, she proceeded to pump for new data, asking questions in her grand and winning way—questions which somehow never made it appear she really needed the information to be perfectly and irrefutably learned on the subject. These new acquisitions would be tucked away somewhere in that magnificent storehouse of hers, under the rather overpowering festoons of chestnut hair. Superb Miss Davies!

"We've just been talking about the singer," Mrs. Brathers explained.

"But *she* knows, then?" asked Madame, lifting her eyebrows.

"Well, yes," replied Mrs. Brathers, squeezing the Spanish lady's hand for moral support, "dear Cassiendra knows. So now the four of us share the great secret together."

But the Señorita was troubled, and she pondered. And presently she asked: "You theenk all this of the seenger is beyond *forgiveness*?"

Mrs. Brathers shook her shapely head and looked with mingled pity and affection upon the little woman beside her. Then she turned to the others with a touch of apology, which her distressing French made doubly pleading: "It's really refreshing, don't you think so, Annetta, to meet with such innocence as the Señorita's in this wicked world of today? Dear Cassiendra is so generous and forgiving that she refuses to see any faults at all in other people!"

(But Cassiendra was thinking, though the thought brought its vague tremour of apprehension: "If it *should* come, now, to the point of choosing...")

Miss Davies, in replying, consented to borrow the felicitous phrase of her friend: "Yet such an attitude as that can scarcely be called upon to handle the business of today's wicked world."

"Alas, no, I'm afraid not," sighed Mrs. Brathers. "I sometimes think it is a pity things have to be as they are. I remember once when Mr. Brathers was still alive he said there were times when he actually felt like taking sides with those who have fallen by the wayside. He was a man of such quick sympathy! On the other hand, my clergyman often told me that in his opinion forgiveness is too often only another form of encouragement. He said that evil in the world must be *stamped* out, not *nursed* out."

"To disregard convention," declared Miss Davies, adjusting her veil preparatory to drawing it down, "lends a false value to the arrangement of life as effected by the herd, at the expense of your own. Yet the scales, even so, do not balance, because you are sure to lose more than the herd gains. Of course we don't believe that certain conventions are alto-

gether right any more, but we still observe them for the sake of symmetry in our lives. Reforms must come slowly, because the average intelligence is incapable of rapid growth."

She was going a little more fully to explain her unique and strikingly profound attitude toward social morality, when the salon door opened and Miss Curtis looked in.

"Oh," she hesitated apologetically.

"*Entrez, mon enfant!*" Madame called out to her. "The tea is all gone, but Miss Davies is talking to us delightfully. Come in, dear child—and do shut the door, for I feel a strong draft."

Miss Curtis came up the steps into the salon a little reluctantly. She was not in the mood for company today. The new picture seemed wretchedly to be going backward rather than forward. However, she came in and sat down, bowing gravely in acknowledgment of Mrs. Brathers' fluttering introduction.

"Ah, yes," the latter resumed, commenting upon the admirable speech of her friend in which false values and conventions had been spoken of, "things simply have to go on just the best way they can. Immorality will always remain something we can't condone. So we must all keep perfectly still about this," she concluded, rather less grandly.

A quiver ran through the salon. Miss Curtis, though without displaying any overpowering enthusiasm, asked what it was to which she referred. Señorita caught her breath. Even Madame looked up sharply.

But Mrs. Brathers remained just as sweetly unfurried as she possibly could. "About the unhappy singer," she said.

Miss Curtis shared the surprise of the others. So *all* of them knew!

"Ahem!" quoth Madame.

Miss Davies rose, saying she really must be going. Of course, if all the town knew it. . . . And she was quite cool at parting. Really, one could not seem to count on exclusiveness any more even with one's most intimate friends!

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

—AND TELLS A FORTUNE

THE Parisian holiday season began in a curious and undeniably commercial manner before December had worn off all the shine of newness, to the tune of a persistent hammering and tinkering in the streets. This signified that endless rows of rough little temporary shops were being erected, to be decked out gaily, when the time came, like booths at a fair. As the season advanced these Boulevard stalls would be found sheltering and exploiting absolutely everything under the sun which anywise invited the process of barter. Things useful and things grotesque; things edible and things eternal; *gâteaux* of odd, bright, indigestible sorts; every conceivable variety of writing material; posters, old books, plaster *objets d'art*; things curious and things silly; things you might possibly find some use for if you sat down patiently to the task of invention; things you couldn't use if you thought till the last trumpet, and whose *raison d'être* was supposed legitimately to expire with your getting them home. Things, things, things! One might walk for miles without exhausting the curbside glory.

For Señorita all this display held infinite charm. She came home, alas, day after day, poorer of purse, and with additional impedimenta for her already over-crowded room. Happily and excitedly she trudged those two vast arteries most encumbered with celebration, the Boulevard des Italiens and the Boulevard Saint Michel. Often even at night the flare of oil torches would discover her white face and illuminate it in a ghastly yet eager fashion. This was her element. Commotion was requisite to her peace. The new life at home was, of course, charming, with its sense of pro-



—AND TELLS A FORTUNE 261

tection and harmony; yet always an ancient longing would rouse her and urge her to rush out where the crowds were, and where life did not run smoothly. That was a part of Cassiendra that would never die. Sometimes she would deliberately spend an afternoon underground, just stepping from one Métro train to another, for the sheer exhilaration of being hurried and bumped and confused. After that she would slip back humbly and gratefully to an evening with her dear friends in the salon.

Every day during the fête season she went out upon the streets. To have a tiny shop of her own here, on one of these historic promenades, with a placard out in front setting forth her mystic prowess and the glowing testimonials, was the thing she most dreamed of now. And in a few short weeks, thanks to the singer, she was really to have one! Inside would be a little table and a tiny bell on it, whereby prospective investors in fortune might signify their advent. Then a pair of protecting portières, shutting out all unpurchased privilege of vision. And behind this tantalizing barrier surrounded by the mysterious accessories of her profession, Señorita Cassiendra Ferruco of Madrid, recommended by all the leading celebrities of Europe, beatific under the stimulating pressure of a renewed practice...!

More or less of this spirit of holiday excitement got into the American residents too, manifesting itself in a variety of ways. Miss Curtis began to look a little wistful underneath her detached stolidity. At home there was a quiet little mother going about in last year's clothes, and a younger sister and an older brother. Hers, of course, was all the splendour; and yet theirs would be the real Christmas this year, while she had only Noël.

To Mrs. Brathers and the Voeuf, holiday distinctions didn't make any difference. "Dear, dear!" the widow exclaimed, "I do believe—twenty-second, twenty-third, twenty-fourth—why, yes, it's actually the day before Christmas. But I declare I never think of it as Christmas over here. Do you?" No. Oh, no. The Voeuf didn't. He didn't think anything that

Mrs. Brathers didn't. Was anything really worth while that she didn't think? "Bless my soul," he exclaimed, "so 'tis! Christmas tomorrow! Why, I'd forgotten all about it." Which was, however, not quite the truth. For in a corner of one of his bureau drawers, carefully stowed away under a quantity of beautifully tidy garments, reposed a little casket. And inside the little casket was a dainty pendant of pearls, with a fair-sized diamond in the centre. Yes, he had certainly thought of Christmas to this extent. But to hear him you would think Christmas meant absolutely nothing.

As for Cyprienne, she expressed considerable excitement. She went shopping after trifles, reveled in the naïve pleasure of gazing at vast decorated Christmas trees in the courts of the great department stores—even said she was going to hang up her stocking. But that mighty institution, *Maison Bernard*, ran on almost exactly as though nothing unwonted were in the air. "*Oui, c'est presque Noël*," Madame admitted, proceeding then to discuss the pleasures they would indulge in on the day of the *Nouvelle Année*—an occasion of such admittedly greater importance.

On the afternoon of the twenty-fourth of December, just prior to departing with Mr. Bromley for the *matinee*, Mrs. Brathers sought the *Señorita*, and urged that she make use of her nice, cosy room while she was absent. "It's so much larger, dear *Cassienda*, and there's such a delightful little fire on the hearth—which it would be a real pity to waste, it really would!"

And *Cassienda* thanked her, and slipped an arm around her waist for a moment, and wished her a happy time with—"with *heem*...."

Left alone again, *Señorita* stood before her window nibbling a slightly soiled turnip. She only employed strictly immaculate turnips and encased them in little silken bags when she was out in society. In private the old, informal methods suited her best.

She nibbled and pondered. Outside the rain was turning into sleet. Finally she roused herself and prepared for her journey to Mrs. Brathers' room.

First she got out a good-sized bag of light blue cloth with sunflowers printed all over it. And into this bag she put sundry articles—all the things she would be likely to need during a long afternoon away from home. She packed, indeed, almost with the care of one about to set out for the Antipodes. Cassiendra was crocheting a bright orange and blue shawl for Mrs. Brathers, and of course this, together with the balls of silk and the vicious-looking needles, went into the bag. Nor did she forget to select a fresh turnip from a paper parcel containing many more, and this went in on top of the shawl and needles. A handful of strong Spanish cigarettes, some matches, a small flask of brandy, a box of her favourite tea. Finally a deck of very worn playing cards was added to the collection.

Then she looked slowly around, taking an impromptu inventory of what must necessarily be left behind, drew together the cords at the neck of the gay bag, and so hied her forth.

Señorita tiptoed first to the kitchen door, listened a moment, then pushed it open. Eléonore and the cook were there, and the cook was paring potatoes. The pensionnaire asked, with an air of mystery, whether Kenneth was upstairs in the "toute petite," but was advised that nothing had been seen of him since breakfast. The announcement appeared to upset her calculations momentarily; however, she left instructions that he be told, if he returned during the afternoon, that she was established in Mrs. Brathers' sanctum and was expecting him for tea. Then, trembling over the momentous possibilities, she tiptoed on.

In the chamber of Mrs. Brathers it was warm and close. "Ah!" she murmured with deep content. Another might have pronounced the place stuffy; but Cassiendra thrived on such atmosphere. A tiny fire gleamed as brightly as coal nug-

get fires ever can, and before it on the hearth reposed a blackened copper kettle in which it was customary to boil water for tea.

Cassienda had, long ere this, been initiated into all the mysteries. Mrs. Brathers had showed her round with affectionate pride. Behind the Japanese screen were the tea things: a few unmatched cups and saucers, lump sugar in a little jar, a glass or two of marmalade. Behind this same ample screen Mrs. Brathers also kept her entire pharmacy of preservatives and preventives. Here stood a formidable row of bottles: all sorts, shapes, and sizes, and each one containing a large printed number. Near the bottles lay a small leather notebook in which again appeared all those numbers, with elaborate explanations covering what each stood for. As an instance of this system, No. 1 read as follows: "Large white tablets, for severe headache or pain; take one every half hour until relieved; to be taken whole, with a swallow of water." No. 2: "Anti-rheumatic; pink tablets, which must be taken exactly according to direction—one every half hour until perspiring, then one every three hours; they are powerful, and an overdose may bring on palpitation of the heart, which, should it occur, go at once to No. 9." The bottle to which this number was affixed proved to be a liquid of greenish tint, already over two-thirds gone. Her pharmacy behind the screen was an enormous comfort to Mrs. Brathers; the little leather book (which showed so subtle yet keen a sense of satire on the part of her physician) almost the Book of Life! On the same shelf Mrs. Brathers also kept on tap the wonderful herb tonic. Yes, there stood the large bottle with the patent stopper, its contents considerably diminished, though an *incredibly* short time had elapsed since its purchase. Never, the widow thought, had the tonic been so beneficial as now! The chemist seemed to have excelled himself in some mysterious way. However, Kenneth knew to what extent the chemist in rue Cambon was deserving of the compliment.

Cassienda went about the room on tiptoe, for that was a settled mannerism—a persistent relic out of her melodramatic

past. Presently she sat down before the fire and began to unpack. Out of the flamboyant traveling bag came, first of all, a cigarette. She lighted and enjoyed it ravenously. Then a longing for turnip prompted a fresh excursion into the bag.

Finally she began crocheting, working her needle in a swift, almost terrifying manner.

At four she filled the copper kettle and spread a small table with a not quite immaculate cloth which she found behind the screen. Then she set out the tea things—tea for two. In a tall box with a hinged cover, marked *Küchen*, which a gentleman had given Mrs. Brathers a long time ago in Strasbourg, Cassiendra found some slender wafers. There was always a supply of these on hand. Once he had learned she was fond of them, the Voeuf kept her beautifully stocked.

The copper kettle on the coals began singing bravely in its stubby spout. And at the very same moment Kenneth burst in, breathless from a long run. His face was flushed with the pleasant sting of sleet.

"Ah, my deeree," she said, clattering the cups a great deal to conceal her excitement, "you have come in the neek of time!" He sniffed the pleasing confusion of tea-time smells. "We will have a bite together," she told him.

She poured the tea, then brought out, with a smirk half of shyness and half of deviltry, the little flask of brandy.

"Good enough!" he cried. "That's bully! Shall we burn it on the sugar, the way we did the first time?"

"Yes, yes!" she laughed nervously. And the huge bow in her hair began violently trembling as she continued: "Afterward, when we have finished, I will read your fortune. Is it so?"

"It certainly is! And don't forget," he reminded her, "that you promised to do it for nothing!"

On the mantelpiece stood the photograph of Timothy Brathers in its ornate bronze frame. His gaze was a rebuke indeed, for what things were these, passing in the very chamber of his devoted spouse? "Beware of fortune-tellers," he had

once cautioned her, "for their tongues speak slime and venom!" And right here in his wife's very chamber now, sat a fortune-teller, the cards outspread before her. And she had taken brandy in her tea. Yea, the gaze of the upright, virile man was sad, stern, forbidding as it encountered these violations.

As she took up the cards Kenneth thought the Señorita's hands grew strangely and eloquently sensitive. She shuffled the full pack very thoroughly and had Kenneth cut it. Then she proceeded to lay out the cards after one of a hundred mystic formulæ she knew. All the fives and sevens and nines were removed, as though an infection had been discovered about them. Next the six of clubs and the eight of diamonds, the ten of diamonds were weeded out also, and put in a place by themselves. After that, what remained of the pack was again shuffled, and the cards were laid out in rows of five. There were seven of these rows. Two lone cards remained over: a superfluity suggesting, to the uninitiated, the possibility that something might have gone wrong with her calculations. However, nothing daunted the face of the Señorita, who promptly disposed of these cards by thrusting them into the ward with the infected. They were to be called on later, and well she knew it, for important services.

"You are the Keeng," she announced, squinting her little sharp eyes. "The Keeng of Clubs. There you are, you see? It is the card we call the seegneefeeecatorrr."

She spoke with considerable stress of mystery. Kenneth kept his eyes closely on the cards, and was very much interested.

Contorting her features occasionally, like some witch doing preliminary obeisance to Beelzebub, she read off the meanings of the outspread cards, counting seven every way from the index card, which she had called the significator. Her words were fleet and bold, invoking prodigious journeys, and chronicling vicissitudes of very great diversity. It was evident from the start that the generous old witch was bent on reading the lad across from her the most delightful fortune she could possibly evolve.



—AND TELLS A FORTUNE 267

Mrs. Brathers' little Flemish clock ticked in a pained way beside the photograph of Timothy Brathers.

Senorita caught up the first seven cards, relegated them ruthlessly to the contagion ward, and such cards as remained she swept together, shuffling them thrice. Then she bespoke another cutting. While Kenneth was performing this slight part in the ritual, she got in a few puffs on her Spanish cigarette. Thus much depleted, the shuffled and recut pack was again spread out, this time in four groups of seven each. There certainly was a surprising variety in her methods, for she didn't read from all the cards this time, scorning entirely the second and fourth groups. The ignored thirteen cards were doomed not again to be brought into play.

Now scanning the first of the two remaining groups, her face took on an exaggerated radiance. She clapped her hands. "Ah, it is the best in the worrld! After a long absence, great joy!" Her mind was quite made up. Now, she thought, the fun begins.

In the second group she discerned more general signs, though everything curiously pointed toward some tremendous fulfilment. Hers was the prerogative of being vague if she chose. What is convincingly oracular without a veil?

Kenneth stretched. He was comfortable and cheerful. He lighted a cigarette and began blowing very successful rings across the table.

At last the inmates of the ward were summoned out and accorded a fumigating shuffle. There was a miraculous healing touch in the fingers of this sorceress. And throughout all this business she maintained a steady patter of talk, which is of super-importance in these mystic expositions. The nuggets sputtered cosily in the grate. Kenneth blew rings which lassoed the Señorita and broke across her shoulders. But she lived only for the cards. She had never before told so momentous a fortune. Out of the shuffle emerged a new arrangement between them on the table. Two red nines popped into view, only once removed from each other. This would not mean anything to you unless you were an adept.

But the Señorita pounced upon them with delight. Honour, dignity, joy they signified. These bits of pasteboard can be wonderfully acute! There were other cards, as they went a-long, which revealed a two-fold blight. Both parents snatched away, zip! It was quite breath-taking.

Kenneth explained, by way of vindicating the cards: "You see, there was a wreck. There, I've done it, Señorita!"

"But what?" she asked, a little nettled by the interruption.

"Made two rings go over your head and break together!"

"If you are not good, I tell no more."

He laughed, socketed his chin in his hands, and gave her an amused attention.

"I see you," she continued, speaking with unusual tenseness, "—five and eight spades—a child, verree small. Si, si. It is plain. Death! I see it—to one. *It is heem!*" she mumbled to herself, laying out more cards. "Two black sevens, two black fives." She shook her head slowly, then caught her breath. "Ah, the nine of spades! Bad—so verree bad." She shook her head again, in a quite tragic manner. "Unhappiness—a scandal. . . ."

"Me?" demanded Kenneth in simulated alarm.

"No, no! It is long ago past."

And she went on examining the outspread cards, her eyes becoming mere bright slits. "Death, again—it is the same one!"

"I'm sure you'll find two if you look sharp," he suggested pleasantly, blowing another ring. "It must have been ever so big a wreck. But you can't get Bromley to say anything. He always fidgets so!"

She flashed her angry challenge: "You are not telling this forrrrtune, monsieur!"

"That's right, Señorita. I'm sorry. Mum!"

"The cards can never lie!" she exclaimed. "It is always the truth they give us." She was visibly excited. Kenneth observed this. It looked anything but make-believe. He had an uncanny moment of wondering whether there really *could* be anything in fortune-telling.



—AND TELLS A FORTUNE 269

"It is here—see? The cards—so. And the four of hearts next, so! She lives! She lives! See, it is right here in the cards!"

"You don't see anything of a wreck anywhere, Señorita?"

"She *lives!*" seemed all the agitated little woman could say. But the proximity of her supreme revelation caused the Señorita to tremble more than ever. Desperately she began sparring for time. Once spoken, the word could never be recalled. "Wait," she said. "We must be patient. Now so—let me see. . . ." An unsteady finger toyed with the lavender lower lip, which was moistened from time to time with a quick outdarting of her slim red tongue. "Ah, there is the greatest happiness—see!" She lightly touched a pair of red sevens and a pair of red fives standing in close conjunction with the nine of hearts. According to the mystic code this combination is reckoned the most fortunate prognostic one could possibly draw, since it signifies "luck, pleasure and money!"

"Thanks!" said Kenneth, blowing a shockingly disrespectful ring, this time right over and all round about the photograph of Timothy Brathers.

"We will go on," she observed more quietly. The fives, sevens and nines were reassembled, together with certain other cards. Fresh rows of sevens were formed. She then slipped off all the end cards and paired them, reading them as they were turned up.

There was more about his mother. Kenneth began to grow seriously interested. "Please look and tell me whether she's beautiful," he demanded. "It would be tremendously too bad if she weren't."

"Si, si!"

She went on, pairing more cards. She clasped her hands and half rose. "There is all museek—nothing else! *She is a seenger!*" The Señorita's eyes were burning. All at once Kenneth felt a strange uncanny shiver creeping up and up till his brain was seized. Damn it, this was amazing make-believe! There was almost a kind of hypnosis in that

maddening gaze of hers. He leaned forward, lightly grasping the table.

"A singer. . . ?"

"Happee cards, happée cards! They come by pairs. And for you—and for you...."

"A singer. . . ?" He repeated it dreamily.

All at once the Señorita's two hands fell upon the cards. They lay there, limp, as though under a spell of paralysis. She was trembling and could not control her voice.

"Ah, my dearee, my dearee. . . . The blessed Marcee pardon if I do a wrong . . . !" Tears began to wet her aging cheeks.

Just at what moment the realization clutched his heart, overcoming every scruple of reason, she did not know. But she watched him in an agony of eagerness. There was a long silence. His look of keen seriousness and inquiry made her falter. After a long, long time his hands crept out and closed over hers.

"Are you sure?" he faltered, "I can't—it isn't possible!" She just nodded her head.

A wave of homesickness swept the boy's heart. He remembered how he had felt that day on the hearth, his head on the head of the grizzly bear. But now he felt curiously numb, wobbly, and dazed as well. And then, all suddenly, down he rushed, down the flights. He didn't knock at the singer's door. Burst it open. Ran through the rooms, calling out to her. He behaved like one possessed. All his coolness and sense of comedy were vanished. He was stirred. *His ego was transcended!* He wanted to tell her so. But Cyprienne wasn't at home. She had gone out for a twilight breath of air.

"Tonight," he murmured as he crept back up the stairs, awed, wondering, to his little tower. "Tonight—at Saint Eustache."

They were going to the midnight mass together.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

THE MESSE DE MINUIT

TO those who first enter the great church of Saint Eustache without premeditation—who wander in, unguided out of a maze of market streets, surprised at finding so admirable a temple in so dingy a neighbourhood—is accorded an experience glowing and unmatchable. Somehow only thus is the fine spirit of the place found articulate. Go home and read your guide books: they will tell you it's degenerate Gothic; but never mind that. Treasure only the first free, sweet impression of a warmly springing nave, where grey rises to the dignity of a colour. Here one discovers the grey of the sea in storm season, or the grey of fine eyes. The grandeur and the finesse of Notre Dame are not duplicated, and there is none of the glass which charms the eye in many an obscure and half forgotten old church. But the nave is high and grey, and the length thereof is like the majesty of a good sovereign.

The huge place was nearly full when they arrived. Divided into sections, like a theatre, and with extensive tickets of admission varying as much in colour as in price, Saint Eustache on these festal nights seemed an oddly mundane affair. You bought your sittings in advance, or risked not witnessing the ceremony. Kenneth was silent—quite unlike himself. Cyprienne walked into the church on his arm, very beautiful in the candlelight. And he smiled up at her, but still was silent. As they proceeded far down an aisle, the great organ behind them rumbled beginning strains of gentle and plaintive promise.

"Here we are," she said softly. "Now you must take

my cloak and spread it over the chair next yours. Keep the place for me, and I'll come back to you as soon as the anthems are sung." She laid her hand a moment on Kenneth's shoulder.

When she was gone he sat perfectly still, his head a little bowed. He felt somehow all made over. He didn't feel quite at home with himself. The alteration, while naturally subtler, seemed to match in importance a small boy's sacrifice of curls. New, strange; something lost, something gained. Just what? Ask the stars.

All about him were people, some kneeling, some quietly chatting about their own affairs, some gazing up in a happy awe at the high altar, where such a profusion of tall candles flamed. About and all about, behind, before, to right and to left swept a surge of human souls; but high overhead, in the steep grey vaulting where the flare of the candles reached so faintly, hovered a great hush. The hour was full of tenderness and peace, touched with suspense, gladdened by the promise of noble song. Kenneth sat perfectly still in the rush-bottom chair.

A very sleek and smart-whiskered cat, all black with the exception of two white cheeks, came nosing curiously but with great dignity through the crowded church. It was a feline in high standing amongst the meat-dealers of the neighborhood. What it sought now was not sustenance but pure companionship—perhaps a sort of crude sustenance of the soul! The cat brushed familiarly against Kenneth's leg. He stooped to pat its head, and the cat purred with brazen vigour.

The wavering notes of the organ grew more confident, as an errant ramble over keys and stops became slowly schooled into one of the chorals of a finely religious though obscure old master. The choral was cramped and confined, in accordance with regulations long since laid to rest. It did not disturb the slumbering soul of that mighty instrument. But there fell, now and then, a tone of prescient passion—a warning (almost touched with terror) that there

dwelt within a wild and many-throated spirit, which, once released, might never be altogether silenced again.

"Ave Maria!" prayed an old woman kneeling behind Kenneth, and telling off her rosary with a steady whisper of beads. "Ave Maria, gratia plena..."

All the great chandeliers were ablaze with candles. Affixed to pillars supporting the ribbed vaulting were flaring bunches of gas jets. An acolyte in gown and broad sash was going about the chancel and across the steps of the sanctuaire dispensing smoking incense, as though to prepare and purify the atmosphere for priestly nostrils.

"Ave, ave!" murmured the devout old woman, still clicking her beads softly. Kenneth remembered with strange vividness his solitary birthday cake and the candle which had shone up to him from a window. The choral drew to a pleading conclusion. The soul of the great organ seemed petitioning a release. But it was not yet time.

Far forward in the apse sounded the puny voice of the "little" organ, supplemented by a discreet orchestra. An aspiring sweep of violins gave thrilling eloquence to the *Messiah* introduction—a singularly happy blending of poise and ecstasy. The theme, luminous and moving, lost none of its stately precision. Then followed certain of the more celebrated arias and choruses, sung with fine nuance and intelligence by the imported singers, of whom Cyprienne was one.

Kenneth heard her voice. It seemed to him quite distinct from the others. He caught the sureness of it, the warmth and spring and the mastery of register shifts; though of course he did not know anything technically about these things. Hers was not by any means a voice of prodigious power. She was essentially a singer of the modern school, where pyrotechnics and volume, as ends in themselves, give place to subtler goals.

Kenneth slipped forward and knelt upon the little *prie-Dieu* before his chair. He bent his forehead down upon his hands. He didn't pray. Never, so far as he could re-

member, had he felt exactly an impulse to pray; and besides, even if he had, nobody had ever taught him how. But as the music of Handel's best inspiration rose to its joyous climaxes, his shoulders trembled a little beneath the fold of his *pèlerine*.

"Kenneth," she whispered.

He started up to find her right beside him. He slid back quickly into his chair, and she sat beside him, drawing the cloak up about her neck. Her face was stimulated with colour and her eyes were bright. New vision had come to her as she sang. "I can give him up," she kept telling herself, "if it is best. Whatever is best *must* happen."

Almost immediately the midnight mass began. The people rustled forward for prayer.

"Kenneth dear," she whispered, "let's kneel—as you were when I came back."

A bell began chiming. Christmas crept softly in over the city. A priest was chanting. At intervals the people murmured in response. Worshippers all about them were mumbling Latin. The wheezy little organ in the apse set the pitch for the priest to continue his recitative. Kenneth turned toward her, resting one cheek upon his clasped hands. Their eyes met. A word passed his lips, and she thrilled as never before in all her life. She knelt there, speechless as he.

Christmas dawned over the world. The Paris bells were sonorous with midnight welcome. The people in the great church stirred. A priest raised over them the emblem of consecration and peace. The acolytes with their clinking chains swung incense, prodigal of blessing. And then at last the voice of the great organ burst into full-bosomed triumph. It swept through the majestic spaces of Saint Eustache, liberated by the master spirit of John Sebastian Bach. A Fantasy-and Fugue, gorgeous and thrilling and free, rebuked the timid choral of an hour ago. A marvellous and subtle thing is the organ of Saint Eustache, at such

times as this seeming truly to possess a grand and phantom-haunted soul, throbbing or reminiscent or mad, now all awirl with the mightier voices of earth and sky and sea, now full of the golden melody of slim reed pipes, flute-clear and isolated, like a star against a tender sunset. The theme soared to the crash of its magnificent climax.

Then the great church emptied, the people streaming out into the narrow streets all cluttered with market produce. Heaps of vegetables, newly disgorged by heavy wagons, nearly blocked the sidewalks. Pungent rural smells made the air rich and almost heavy. Men were moving smartly about, working toward the dawn. And the worshippers from the midnight mass streamed out under the stars.

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

THE CANDLE IS LIGHTED A SECOND TIME

NATURALLY the first person to whom Kenneth wanted at once to communicate his good fortune was Mr. Bromley. And since he chose, as usual, a wholly blunt and unqualified method of conveying the upsetting intelligence that at last he knew the whole awful truth, Mr. Bromley, being so terrifyingly burst in upon just as he was receiving a pitcher of hot water from Eléonore, felt his knees go weak. He stammered and set the pitcher down noisily. Then he had to sit down himself. He really had to. And it is painfully necessary to record the fact that the name of the Deity once more escaped those so abstemious lips. Yes, it was always women who made Mr. Bromley say "Good God!"

And naturally, too, the first thing the Voeuf wanted to know was how Kenneth found out. And Kenneth delicately yet conclusively left it in the air with a subtly begun question: "Didn't you feel somehow, sir, when you confided it to Mrs. Brathers....?" The responsibility was pladed! Why drag in Señorita? Besides, in the highest sense it *was* Mrs. Brathers. And of course at that Mr. Bromley was completely disarmed. He hadn't a thing to say. What could he say? He began speaking, indeed, but only to break off, inarticulate after all, merely making sounds in his throat and planting his arms in supreme perplexity upon his salient hips, while in his face the quintessence of owldom was attained. No, after that he couldn't say a thing until he'd had a consultation with Mrs. Brathers. Why, it wouldn't be chivalrous even to interrogate! If she had told, then there

was nothing to do but uphold her act. And as he conjured the new aspect of the situation, a wave of devotion came over him. Yes, and overcame him. It was one of those large, calm, silent exaltations wherein Mr. Bromley, through the benign influence of his great love, seemed rising to the very noblest heights.

He poured out the water into his bowl. It was by this time tepid; but the minor inconvenience was supported with cheerful stoicism. There was a certain sublimity, now, about everything he did. "Eh? Eh?" he asked evasively, yet with a mildness which gave Kenneth bounding hope. "You want to live with her, eh?" *Did* Mrs. Brathers mean he was to sanction even this? And why, *why*? He shook his head somewhat sadly, spreading across his face a little of the chilly water, which trickled out between his knotty fingers and dropped back into the bowl. Tz, tz, tz! What would they say at home? He murmured it, losing himself and everything else, for the moment, in this awful reminder of Tom's oldest friends.

"I'd say let them go hang," suggested Kenneth, rocking back and forth on the bed, his knees clasped in the air.

But the Voef shook his head again, even more sadly (though, underneath it all, the sense of exaltation still held him) and began to comb his bristling hair. Then he got into a stiff shirt and launched upon the slow torture of inserting studs.

"My mother says we can't do anything unless you sanction it," said Kenneth in his very politest tone, while the struggling widower voiced many a petulant "shoot!" under his breath, as a recalcitrant stud would repeatedly slip when his clumsy fingers pushed. "She says you're the only one who has the power to dispose of me." It was all faintly wistful.

"Well, I'm glad she has the decency to concede my having a little say!"

"Oh, she concedes your having a great deal of say—just ever so much! I don't honestly see," Kenneth insisted, "how

you could do anything else, sir, with everybody acknowledging that you have all the power there is."

The Voctf seeking Mrs. Brathers, found her in tears.

"I've never been so insulted in all my whole life!" she wailed, her eyes for a moment almost flashing despite their soft perpetual mistiness.

And his alarmed questioning brought out the intelligence that she had just come from a fatal scene with Madame. At first she just absolutely refused to be comforted at all. "It's over those miserable little *petits pains*!" she sobbed.

"The *petits pains*?"

Mrs. Brathers nodded and gave way to fresh floods. Poor Bromley sat beside her, terribly disturbed and unhappy. He took her hand and gently smoothed it. He even argued within himself the propriety of carrying it discreetly to his lips, under pressure of the emotion which so swayed them both. However, the lady herself at length determined this point of indecision by withdrawing her hand and regaining her voice.

"You know," she began tremulously, "I've been having two *petits pains* with my chocolate in the morning instead of just one. They're so small—you know—so very, very little—and I was sure my doctor would agree with me that I ought to have more nourishment in the morning. So I asked Madam if I could have two, and she told me I could, and I thought nothing more about the matter until—until. . . ." Again she lost control, and though she subsequently found herself able to proceed, sobs continued to punctuate her sentences into most unexpected intervals. "Today," she faltered, "Madam sent me my semi-monthly pension bill, and—and. . ."

"What, dear Mrs. Brathers, wasn't the bill correct?"

"Oh, oh! She included them!"

"You mean she charged you for the rolls?"

Mrs. Brathers nodded miserably. "There were fifteen. Oh, it wasn't the few pennies themselves I cared about, of

course. But to think that for each little roll, which I really needed for nourishment, an extra charge was made” She wiped her eyes. “A cent apiece!”

Well, of course Bromley was frightfully indignant. He called it outrageous. And then Mrs. Brathers confided the supreme chagrin. She had gone to Madame about it, and Madame had flown into a tantrum. And at the climax of the tantrum Madame had declared that the Americans were all gourmands!

“That’s just what she called her unfortunate husband!” cried Mr. Bromley. “Oh, that she should dare . . . ! I’ll go to her at once about this!”

And then—it certainly was amazing, but he had to accommodate himself as quickly as he could—Mrs. Brathers grew suddenly and mysteriously calm, actually almost cheerful! “No, no!” she replied. “You mustn’t do that. My spirit is completely broken, so far as this house is concerned, so that—so that. . . .”

“Yes, Mrs. Brathers?”

“So that all I want to do now is—is to go away—and forget. . . .”

He felt at sea, yet tuned himself to flattering eagerness. “Yes, yes. We will leave the house at once. We will not stay another night under a roof that is hateful to you, dear Mrs. Brathers!”

“But Kenneth. . . .” she faltered.

And then he remembered about Kenneth, too. And then he made so bold as to avalanche all his new troubles upon her. “Kenneth has found out, after all.” And of course she was simply amazed to hear it, and voiced her amazement in tones still flavoured with, and bolstered by, the lachrymose breath of her now spent emotion. His eyes searched hers and found only a wide innocence. Lord, *how* this complicated things!

“I come to you, dear Mrs. Brathers,” he wailed at last, “feeling quite helpless—quite at my rope’s end!”

“You poor man!” she said, a fresh impulse prompting

the voluntary surrender of her hand. This time (for he was no ninny in these matters, after all) Mr. Bromley did kiss it before she could draw it away. She blushed faintly, and, obviously still inspired by the same mysterious new need which had been so quick to convey the only remedy for her wretchedness over the *petits pains*, a lovely light stole into her eyes. He felt, insensibly, that she was, however delicately, coming back again to her own problem—right back where they started.

"It's true, isn't it," she suggested, borrowing from uncertain authorship, "what's done cannot be undone?"

Yes, she was certainly becoming dominated by a new thought. But what it was he couldn't guess. And yet, though she was so entire an enigma, Mr. Bromley would devotedly fit himself to the mood. Every mood was dear; he would try to fit himself to every mood. Mr. Bromley dimly realized that he had become, indeed, a kind of sublime tailor in this regard. It was evident that Mrs. Brathers had been thinking rapidly. She had the look, to put it a little bluntly, of one whose thoughts are plunging like fire-engine horses. The upshot of it all was that a gleam of tenderness and pity shone in her bird-like eyes. "I think you must let him go!" she cried.

Mr. Bromley gasped; but this did not alter things. The fact that Kenneth now shared the mighty secret seemed making a difference, suddenly, all round. Yes, he gasped. But she was firm and wouldn't let the shine die out. "I see it clearly. You must! It will make a new woman of her. It—it will redeem her, Mr. Bromley!"

He was too thunderstruck even to begin to say anything. But she prevailed with him, in her sweet way. The exaltation stole again upon him, so that, recognizing her his conscience, his over-soul, the Voëuf was wholly prepared to meet the next complication: a wistful, open return to her own affairs. The return was at once timid and joyous; also, on her part, it was not quite free of a blush, as though she feared even so high-minded and delicate a soul as Mr. Brom-

ley might, after all, be, if only half consciously, gross enough somehow to connect this gentle returning with her tears over the *petits pains* and especially her zeal for the redemption of Cyprienne.

"I've just received such urgent letters from my dear friend Mrs. Candlewick, down in Italy—two written the same day! She's at the Lago Maggiore, and is so *very* anxious for me to come and spend a month with her that—considering the fog, which you know always makes me so melancholy here, and now my trouble with Madam—I really....yes, I really think I'll go. It seems like fate, somehow," she ended, just a little awed.

And then Mr. Bromley looked at her so very queerly that she had to laugh. It rather took away, for a moment, from the nervousness of the situation. And she shoved his knee a little. And then—well, then Mr. Bromley did a wonderfully romantic thing. Dropped right down on the same knee she had shoved, sliding gently off his chair. He seized one of the widow's hands and pressed it with a warmth he had not hitherto quite dared evince. In this position he proposed marriage, for the third time—proposed it with an ardor which outdid all his previous efforts since he had wooed poor Cassiendra in the Spanish moonlight of long, long ago.

And, miraculously, Mrs. Brathers didn't rebuff him this time! There was a little silence, and she didn't once move her head in the wan, gentle negative now so familiar to these occasions. The Voeuf thrilled to a new gust of confidence. He spoke on, more glowingly than ever. He felt himself a being of fire. And all the while she just kept her eyes cast down, in a manner that could almost be called coquettish. And at last she said, laying her free hand upon his: "If you really do care...."

"Ah, but you know how I care!"

"Then"—and she caught her breath a little as she realized the sublime consequence of what she was saying—"then—ah, Mr. Bromley, I—I *don't* want to go to Italy alone."

And after that she was in tears again. But happy tears—

oh, really quite radiant tears. And of course Mr. Bromley simply didn't know what to do! He caught ecstatically at the ragged fringes of his epochal hope. Her words were incredible! They overwhelmed him. His pale eyes filled with tears too.

"Now you must get up," she said with emotion so rich it made her voice quite guttural with huskiness. But when the widower had obediently slid back on to his chair, Mrs. Brathers, in her own baffling way, fearing lest all this might appear just a shade perfervid, qualified in a breath: "It would be such a help about the hotels and trains..." And then, bringing him still more emphatically down to earth, without, of course, quite depriving him of his giddy prospects, she added: "But of course everything will depend upon your being able to dispose of Kenneth."

Well, although undeniably brought down by some of these qualifications, Mr. Bromley was still so excited and so unreasoningly happy that he hardly knew what he did. With Kenneth out of the way there would be no further obstacles between him and the most unutterable felicity. He would go to Anna at once. He would tell her she might have her boy back after all. In five minutes he would be free, quite free. However, as he went hastening down the flights, a sense of very faint impending difficulty made his face assume just a little of the more usual anxiety.

Cyprienne was at home, and received him with real brightness of manner—thus, in a way, carrying on his ordeal for him while he groped for words and muttered commonplaces. He took the chair toward which she waved him; yet paused in crossing and queerly sniffed, his eyes aswim with misty recollection.

"It's locust—'pon my word, it's locust!"

"Yes," she assured him, smiling and whisking her handkerchief to her nose. "Strange you should have remembered!"

He dropped the heavily wrinkled lids down a moment over

his eyes, effacing the years, and stood thus some little time, his head raised in sentimental reverie. After a bit she stirred—just a faintly satirical swish of her gown—so that he opened his eyes and lowered his head more on to the every-day level. And then with a deep sigh, he sank, rather confused, down into his chair, and sat without relaxing. He couldn't relax—he was growing each moment more terrified. Yet why should he be terrified? He had come down to redeem her. But how, after all—ah, just how—did one go about it to redeem a woman?

She rested one slippered foot upon the tawny head of a tiger, her position appearing thus oddly fortified—even, actually, a little formidable. Mr. Bromley, clutching and releasing the arms of his chair, looked at the red mouth and gleaming teeth of the imperial beast—seemed dared to an attack. And yet it wasn't an attack he had come down here to make at all, but instead.... Ah, what confusing and upsetting times these were!

"God knows I've tried to do my duty." He was ever so solemn. And when she gazed at him with subtle inquiry, he added: "We—we must talk it over between us." Yet it still remained for him to state his case. "I am leaving Paris soon"—there seemed in the air between them a sly irony over his not having left long, long ago!—"and since it doesn't seem wise to take Kenneth out of school—his lessons—the Sorbonne—I suppose, as the boy's guardian, and in view of the fact...." He knew he would have to begin all over again. A fresh attempt netted him this: "I assure you my one object at this time is to show you every consideration." ("Pity," of course, was the ideal word to have worked in somewhere. But he laid his remissness, afterward, to the presence of all these disconcerting beasts, which were so undeniably on her side.)

There was a flash of her past. She caressed it with a bitter air of luxury. "Friendship is a terrible thing, Mr. Bromley." He intuitively discerned the drift, forlornly wished they might have avoided the angle, and desperately

followed her. "You knew the mechanism of these things, Mr. Bromley. I've even thought of you"—and she gave him a wan smile—"as a sort of righteous angel, since who knew how it would all end? An angel with a flaming sword, Mr. Bromley! And yet, all the while—well, the fact that I *was* innocent, you know, made the little affair, I've always felt, rather unique. A simple friendship, Mr. Bromley." There was a brief silence, and then she said:

"Of course we were desperately unhappy, Tom and I—oh, so desperately." Her eyes were sad, and her fine mouth drooped a little. "Still, I had theories about marriage."

"Theories...." he murmured.

"Of course they were only theories. I don't suppose they'd mean anything to the law. Oh, I realize, as I quite realized then, how weak any sort of defense I could offer would have been. For there seems no legal way of searching hearts. And so, you see, it's probably best and simplest just to go on thinking of you as the angel with the flaming sword."

In a sense, he thought comfortingly, no married woman has a right to masculine friends—friends, at any rate, of an ardent and unorthodox character. There certainly had been a romantic cast to that friendship, however simple she might now choose to style it. The fatal letter.... At all events, in his own mind, Mr. Bromley drew what solace he could from a dim and slender argument. Still, there seemed something, after all, a little tawdry about the sword. And the flame began to be tinged with a faint suspicion of brimstone.

At last they came back to Kenneth. And she asked, with a flash of fun in her eyes, whether he felt he had the right—"the moral right, I mean"—to take a step like this. And Bromley cleared his throat. She was somehow making it all very difficult. "Everything considered, Anna...." There was something the matter with Mr. Bromley's throat. It seemed impossible to clear it successfully. And a moment later she registered the reminder: "As it is, he's at such a

terribly critical age, Mr. Bromley." She wanted to proceed coolly and comprehensively. After all these years there would be time now to weigh every fact. But he asked himself: was she arguing *against* it? Wasn't she going to *let* them be on her side, however much they really wanted to be there—however urgent their being there had now become? Bromley ran a hand lightly over his whiskers. He was sitting ludicrously upright in his chair—leaning, indeed anxiously forward a little.

And after a long, long time filled with talk which never quite found itself: "Mr. Bromley," she said tempting the tiger with her flirting foot, "isn't it odd! We meet after all these years, and you come to me with a thing of this kind! But stranger still seems the fact that we meet so mutually full of hope. I won't exactly say we meet joyously, nor will I be so extreme as to say I'm a 'merry' widow. Still, you see me—I'm not wasted." She made a little complex gesture. "And I judge," she went on, her mood growing more and more baffling to him, "you're still on the move too—going ahead—full of hope and prospects. Mr. Bromley!"—she held out her hand to him implusively as they rose, she first and he necessarily following her example—"I *do* wish you the best sort of luck!"

And actually, before he half realized it, Mr. Bromley found himself shaking hands with the woman Tom had divorced—shaking hands with her because she had wished him good luck in his warfare against Timothy Brathers' ghost!

"But Kenneth?" he faltered.

"Ah, Kenneth. . . ."

"Oh," he cried suddenly, clasping his hands and half extending them toward her in a posture of stiff but fervent entreaty, "it's come to the point with me where everything depends on your taking him back. I can't let you refuse! The time has come," he expanded, with furtive grandeur, but also with a sense of his now complete humility, "when I must cease being a guardian to take up—to take up a new and higher responsibility."

And the light shining out of his solemn owl eyes in a flash told her his whole happy secret.

"I see," she said quietly, almost as though a little touched. And she told him: "I believe we must call it settled, then—quite settled, Mr. Bromley." There was light in her eyes, too.

So, in a state of half awed exultation, he left her.

Mrs. Brathers was just as excited as a girl. She made him sit down and tell her all about it.

"For a time," he said, laughing, now it was all safely over, though still a little nervously, "I couldn't seem to figure her out at all. My brain was terribly confused! There were so many wild animals all round the room. I know it seems incredible up here that there should have been any kind of a hitch; but down there strange things are credible."

Mrs. Brathers was all softness and tenderness. "These women," she said, with an air of essaying to soothe even the memory of his confusion, "are very subtle. Their life seems to make them that way."

But then he brightened and told her the joyous climax: she had agreed to take Kenneth back—and right away, too, so there need be no possible delay for them!

Upon which, in her delighted excitement, Mrs. Brathers gave Mr. Bromley a fluttering kiss and called him a dear good man. And then—there commenced the most furious sort of planning for the wedding!

"Of course," she observed, "ordinarily I'd want to have a cathedral wedding; and I always said if I ever *should* marry again I'd want to married by—by a bishop, if *possible*. But as it is, since it's so necessary to get down to Italy just as quickly as we can, under the circumstances I think we'd better make it the most sensible kind of ceremony possible."

And of course the Voëuf was entirely agreeable to that. He was always entirely agreeable to anything that was agreeable to her.

The whole house was thrown in an enthusiastic uproar.

Mrs. Brathers, entirely forgetting about her recent tragic clash over the *petits pains*, rushed to Madame with it all; and Madame, her mouth twitching with enigma, her brows faintly arching at first, but humour gradually making her shrewd eyes twinkle, agreed to turn the salon over to them, and even convert *déjeuner à la fourchette* into a kind of special wedding breakfast!

Away speeds the Voeuf, to accomplish all the important details, such as getting a license and arranging about their transportation. But after him, lo! roused and stimulated and subtly infuriated by all this overpowering gladness, creeps the Señorita. She clutches his sleeve as he hastens, with long strides, down the corridor.

"Pleece—a moment. . . ."

"Yes, yes, Cassienda. What is it?"

He is going away, she says. It is doubtful if they will ever meet again. These European encounters are apt to be without sequel. It is about the invention—for the last time. Well?

He had promised to help her sell the invention—Albert.

Yes, yes. Of course. And so he will. All he can. Yes, he will tell his friends about it—anyone he thinks might be interested. He will do everything he can for her. Just now. . . .

Pleece—he is going away. She may never, never see him again. His friends—they will not come to buy. She knows they will not come to buy. She has been theenkeeng. . . .

What is this she has been thinking? What is this faint yet horrid hint of telling something?

"Oh, Albert—it was in the Catholeec Church And you said Rrossetti should have painted my picture!"

"Well," says he at last, with an eager glance on down the corridor, "then—then I'll buy it of you myself! Yes, I will take the thing definitely off your hands. What is your price?"

She hops and squeals for joy. "I thank you—I thank you,

a thousand times. Ten thousand times I thank you! And—not a *word* . . . !”

Her finger is laid shrewdly across her lilac lips in a gesture of permanent promise.

Silence. . . . *golden* silence!

And while of course nothing so indelicate was even hinted, in their separate souls it was freely enough acknowledged by Cassiendá and the Voeuf that this purchase of the invention amounted to a second lump. As Mr. Bromley sat down before a little table with an orange and pink spread and filled out a cheque on his bankers at home, he vaguely and somewhat shakily wondered whether other lumps lurked in the future. . . .

She lost no time in having the big box moved out of her room and into that of its new owner. The shift was made without calling up the *conciérge*, Eléonore being beckoned in to lift one end, and Cassiendá and cook supporting the other. Bromley was absent from his chamber. When he came back he met Eléonore just edging out. She whispered a final desperate “Oh, monsieur. . . .” Within he found Señorita shoving the invention across a corner. She didn’t push it in snug, but preferred it cross-wise, that being more in the esteemed Spanish style—more “fancy,” as the Victorians would say. They stood there for a moment eyeing it. She admitted, in her quaint, whirring English, that it wasn’t a very beautiful invention. Then she brightened and told him he might have her bust of Cervantes on top of it, if he liked, until he went away.

“No, no,” the Voeuf returned quickly. “You’re very kind to offer it, but the time is so short.”

“Oh, Albert!” She held out her pathetic little hand to him. “I hope you will make of it a *million*!”

They got a nice, brisk little rector from a church in the American quarter—a rector who, in the words of the incomparable Annetta Davies, “managed everything in a very spirited, up-to-date way.” Mrs. Brathers wore a lovely



THE CANDLE IS LIGHTED 289

new traveling suit and the pendant Albert had given her at Christmas. And Mr. Bromley made a distinguished if not momentarily almost handsome bridegroom in his cutaway and best pearl gaiters. And of course Kenneth was there, suppressing his giggles of appreciation as well as he could. And of course Cassiendra was there, nibbling turnip from the elegant little silk bag, her eyes misted somewhat, and her heart rather full of confused emotion. . . . A part of the time there were glints, almost like the barbs of old, in her sparkling eyes. And just as the rector asked whether anyone knew any reason why these two shouldn't be united in the bonds of holy matrimony, a spasm of outraged jealousy almost sent her flying between them with the upsetting and terrible cry: "He's mine, *mine!*" But after all, she only nibbled her turnip and looked on, like the rest.

And then, with bewildering swiftness, it was all over. They were Mr. and Mrs. Bromley! And there was champagne for breakfast. And everybody, as is always the case at such times, wanted to talk at once. And everybody laughed a great deal. And certain graveyard groanings must be thought of as strictly within the picture.

After the happy couple had departed, it was discovered that just one thing had been overlooked: the invention—Señor Ferruco's life work, which had stirred up such a deal of tumult, yet the nature of which remained, right to the end, an utter mystery. What kind of invention was it? Even Cassiendra had never seemed quite sure. But now, with all the "dramatic values" fulfilled, what did it matter, after all? Still, he had left it behind. There it reposed, in a corner of Bromley's room. And as Madame stood over it a very cunning look came into her eyes. She would send it on after him—collect! But the next moment a wave of compassion swept her heart, and in the end the big box just went into the attic, to grow enshrouded with the slow dust of time.

When Kenneth sped downstairs, three steps at a bound, to deliver an account of the whole proceedings, he did not

encounter his mother in the music room, where she was usually to be found. Indeed, he was just disappointedly deciding she wasn't anywhere in the house when he suddenly came upon her in her boudoir.

"Come in, dear!" she called out, catching sight of him in one of the mirror-panels of her little dressing-table. She was lavishing last touches upon her hair, which already looked as though nothing could possibly be added to its sheer and almost formidable perfection.

Kenneth dropped boyishly into a *fauteuil* by the window, swinging one leg over the arm, and began pouring out his own vehement yet whimsical version of the immensely important affair in which his guardian had figured.

"Can't you just imagine!" he cried.

"Yes, dear—now *where* could I have put that emerald hat pin?"

It was not just at first that he noticed her almost flurried detachment. But when he did—for she was simply paying no attention at all—then he broke off suddenly and exclaimed: "What's up?"

His mother didn't realize he had addressed a question, but went on absorbedly trying to adjust a very wonderful hat at the supreme angle. And when she encountered her boy's amazed look in the glass, she turned to him and said warmly, yet still with a persistent detachment that bewildered him more and more: "Kenneth, dear, this is Jeanne's afternoon out. Should you mind just brushing me a little bit, while I put on my veil?"

"But where are you rushing off to?" he asked, his face alive with wonder and a growing suspicion.

"Hugh's coming for me, darling. It's time now, and I don't feel I'm half ready yet!"

"But why is he coming? Where are you going when he does get here?"

"We're going to drive, Kenneth. Do you mind handing me those gloves? No, the dark ones, dear—that's right. We're just going out for a little drive. Do you like this hat?"



THE CANDLE IS LIGHTED 291

"Yes," muttered Kenneth, subdued in the midst of his surprise at her most amazing conduct. He had never seen her rushing around like this before. What could it mean? They heard a distant bell.

"There he is now!" she cried. "Goodbye, darling! Be good. We'll be back in plenty of time for dinner, and Hugh's going to stay and dine with us."

"Don't you want your gloves after all?" demanded Kenneth desperately as she was hurrying right away.

And then she paused and turned back to him, holding out her arms impulsively. "My precious boy," she said, pressing him close to her, "I'm so happy and so distracted I hardly know what I'm doing! Because you see I promised to give Hugh his answer while we're driving!" And when she had kissed him, and he had seen her eyes, the boy knew there wasn't any use asking what sort of answer it would be.

Soberly alone, in the room with the pool, Kenneth had a sad, defeated look. What had taken place was, somehow, another very severe blow for his ego. He had meant, in some way or other, to hold the mighty hunter in a long suspense. But now they had utterly ignored his role of strategic unit and had gone right over his head in the matter!

He pondered his Waterloo—became vaguely wistful. He was just about as much alone, right this minute, he told himself, with all said and done, as the night he had eaten the birthday cake. The tense, surprising little comedy was all played out.

Suddenly a whimsical inspiration came to him. He got a candle, lighted it, and placed it in the window, just where it had burned once for *him*

However, it was wholly inevitable that what represented so enormous an expenditure of sentiment should set on foot some sort of violent reaction. He turned a hand-spring. It wasn't enough. Then a brilliant idea flashed into his mind. He embraced it. He hugged and affectionately pommeled it. In brief, he laughed, got a good running start, and so, although fully clad (for of course being so was part of the brilliance of the idea) dived right down into the midst of the friendly pool.



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